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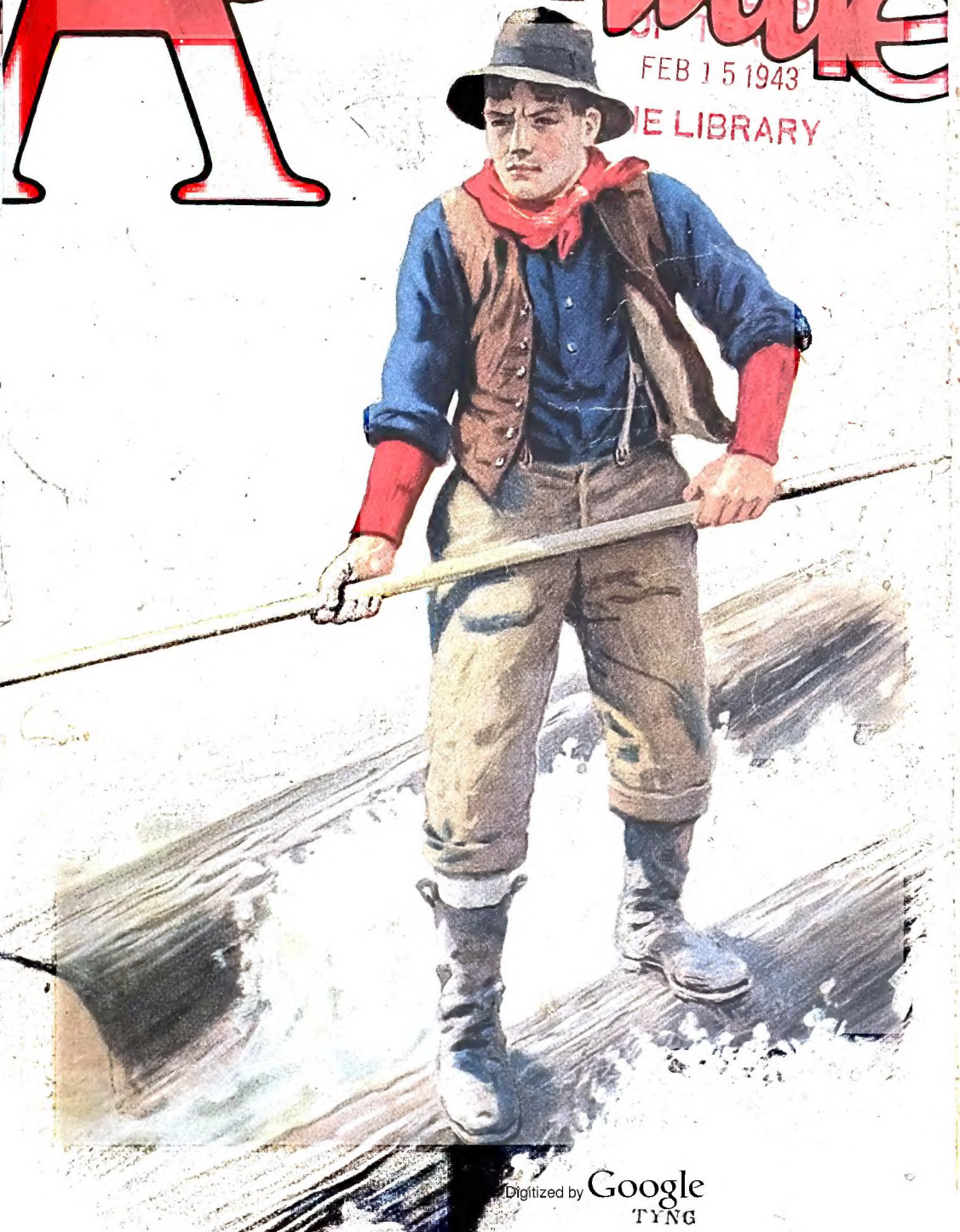

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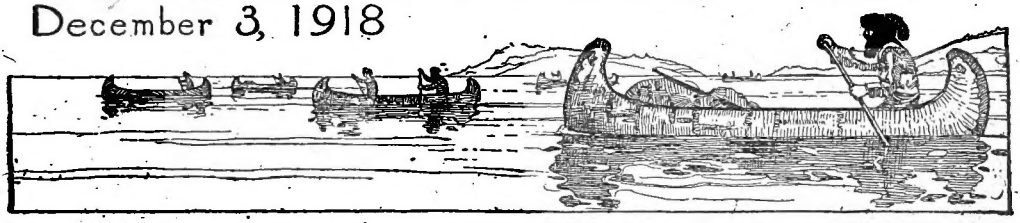
Volume 19
Number 5

December 3, 1918



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Another mystery story of the North Woods by the authors of "Penitentiary Post"

THE WHITE KHAN *A Complete Novelette*

By H. A. LAMB

A stirring story of the adventures of *Khlit*, the sixteenth-century Cossack of the Curved Saber

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Mid-December Issue

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Adventure

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December 3, 1918
Volume 19,
Number 5

OAKES RESPECTS AN ADVERSARY

A Complete Novelette

By Talbot Mundy

An Up and Down the Earth Tale

Author of "The Soul of a Regiment," Hira Singh's Tale," etc.

THE stories Fred Oakes can tell of his adventures in all corners of the world are, Heaven knows, numberless. I have known people to doubt that so much could ever happen to one man. But I have known him too long and intimately ever to doubt one word he says, and to my mind the thing to be amazed at is his length of memory. His own explanation is worth recording:

"There's nothing remarkable about it. We get what we look for. Take a parson, for instance: doesn't he dodge devils every day? Is there anything to comment on if a lawyer fights two cases or more a week? Or if a soldier goes to war pretty often? I tell you, a hunter hunts, a fisherman fishes, a ship's captain masters the elements. A true adventurer adventures, not specializing so much as embracing all occupations in the one. Very early in life I decided to adventure; and I qualified to be a prospector with that one end in view.

"So you see, I've been soldier, lawyer, hunter, fisherman—you'd be surprised how often a fisherman!—ship's captain on occasion—everlastingly at war with the elements and chance—and I've buried too many good and true men not to have a slice of parson in my make-up.

"But it's as prospector for minerals that an alert adventurer finds his widest field; and as free-lance writer that he can best keep in touch with opportunity, or feather an empty nest. Those are my two chosen standbys. So, if things hadn't happened to me thick and fast, that would be astonishing. That they did happen is only natural. To me, adventure is life, and life is a succession of adventures. Monotony is death, and the only death. I adventured into the world by being born in a dungeon in the Tower of London. I refuse to say how long ago, and I pray God I may adventure out again when the proper time comes!"

"In a dungeon in the Tower?" I asked. "How can that be?"

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"I will tell you some day. Monty could have told you better, for his father and mine were intimate. Good Lord, how the time goes! Think of it—'Didums' went over the border eleven years ago this afternoon!"

We grew silent, he thinking no doubt of a hundred adventures he had shared with the bravest gentleman either of us ever knew, and I of the many I had shared with both of them, playing always a minor part yet generously accorded a greater portion of the credit than was due me. They were strong men in the prime of life when I was a stripling out of college. By their kindness to me they gained a hero-worshiper—which is sometimes not such a useless asset, if you are tolerant—and by my effort to live up to their standard of manliness I gained two friends such as seldom fall to the lot of man.

Thought's processes are swift. Probably Oakes, in the chair that faced me on the club veranda, tugging at his grizzled, upturned mustache reviewed a lifetime. Having less than he to remember, it was naturally I who finished first, and broke the silence.

"Speaking of death and of Didums," I said, "you have never told me why you didn't kill him that time in the Libomba foothills."

Fred Oakes sat up, and his eyes blazed for an instant, as I have seen them do very often when the sight of oppression angered him, or the odds against himself and friends were ten or more to one. Then he laughed at himself, and leaned back.

"I've never told any man," he answered. "Tell me now."

But he sat silent after that for thirty minutes, and I supposed him unwilling to lay his heart bare.

AS FOR me, who also had loved Monty, those memories were the reverse of terrible—chiefly, I suppose, because they included my own return from nether hell to something more resembling heaven. I hold no brief against college life, but I do maintain that it unfits a man for life before the mast on sailing-ships.

I consider it less to my discredit than a proof of gentle raising, that after a voyage that had led—at the dictates of a nearly crazy skipper—along the arc of a composite grand circle into Antarctic blizzards—after battling for months with wet cotton sails, and ice, and adverse winds, manning the clumsy pumps often for days and nights on end, and eating worse than crow to help line the aforesaid skipper's pocket, I left my wages on board a three-masted British bark at the first chance, and deserted.

At the time it did not look much like the act of God that the port was Lourenço Marques—unless you consider God, as the vikings did, a very present spell for causing trouble.

It is easy to say at this late day that I had no business in the fo'castle of any such ship, or of any ship at all, and that the experience served me right. But unless, and until you have yourself left college penniless, have seen all your hopes for a career go up in smoke, and have trudged the streets of London city in search of honorable hire, you are not qualified to pass judgment. I had muscle and a good opinion of my pluck. I used them both; and if that particular experience was ugly, it led to my meeting Oakes and Lord Montdidier—an outcome worth the payment, in advance, of any price.

But to get back to the bark: we had not put in, for that would have cost our skipper harbor dues, but lay wallowing in the outer bay while a south wind kept three cables taut ahead of us, and the old blunt-nosed anachronism—named by some one with a gift for irony the *Heatherbell*—scooped up the muddy waves and tossed them over herself like a *must* elephant heaving hay.

However, a Greek boatman will dare anything less than eternity for the sake of unrighteous profit, and it happened that I was made night watchman—deck, not anchor watch. The skipper and mate had a bottle of peach brandy between them in the cabin; and the second mate, who had been snubbed for suggesting we would ride more comfortably higher up the bay, made himself snug in the break of the poop and went to sleep.

Nobody could tell that I had a shore suit under my oilskins, and in my pocket the last of a too lean patrimony in the shape of English gold. I had another suit and some odds and ends in a small bag carefully hidden, and a heart full of rebellion that was much less easy to conceal.

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Only one Greek dared the elements that night. He worked his open boat up under our plunging stern, lowered his little sail, and threw me a line very handily, little expecting such swift returns. But I had no choice.

I bent a life-line to the handle of my bag and sent it down to him between waves. Then, before he guessed what was happening I came down the life-line hand over hand, bringing his own line with me. I let go the instant my feet touched the boat bottom, and we were away from under the *Heatherbell's* stern, beam on to a whale of a sea, and in dire need of action, not argument, before the Greek could remonstrate.

When the south winds blow there is no shelter in all that roadstead except the little concrete pier where passengers land and the customs officers take toll. I have seen twenty ships drag anchor there of an afternoon and all go banging and plunging together to the confluence of the Tembe and Umbuluzi rivers.

Until we reached that pier the Greek and I worked like Trojans. Then, in the rain and the dark, each with a hand on the pierwork to keep the little boat from being ground to splinters, we argued out our business problem, while a Portuguese sentry up above the steps regarded us with Sphinx-like disapproval.

The Greek—for his is a garrulous race—wasted the first few plunging moments in explaining that to land anywhere else that night would be stark impossible. I could judge that well enough, without his wet breath in my ear. Then he explained that the sentry was posted there expressly to prevent unauthorized landings—that the immigration officers were very strict—and that only he, Georgos Aleutherios, had cunning and popularity enough to pass me by. He offered to spiflicate his conscience, take chances, and perhaps even ruin his good standing with the authorities forever, all for the trifling sum of fifty pounds.

We came to terms at last for five pounds, he to pay the sentry; and I learned afterward that I might have bought a lieutenant's services, with half a company of infantry thrown in, for that sum. But rain and wind and darkness—the plunging of a small boat in the lee of a pier—armed sentries—immigration laws—and treaties that call for the surrender to their ships of all deserting seamen, spur youth's eagerness without sharpening youth's wit. A young man afraid and five gold sovereigns are very easily parted, and the Greek could have had the double of it if he had only known.

At any rate, there I stood presently on the rain-soaked sand of Portuguese East Africa, with two good suits of clothes to my name, and ten remaining pounds between me and the fort jail. I had yet to learn to fear that jail, or to know of its existence; but I began with such gratitude to feel steady earth underfoot that no forebodings troubled me.

The first night was spent—what was left of it—trudging the streets; for there were no hotels open, and I did not care to risk being followed into some dry corner by an armed policeman and asked questions in a tongue I did not know. It was a miserable, very hungry, dirty, weary night, but it came to an end, and dawn found me still an optimist.

As soon as doors began opening, and Hindus and Chinese came out to rinse their teeth and hawk, and clean themselves over the gutter, I entered the best hotel in sight, and for the first time since I went to sea had the advantage over a sailor to the manner born; for having removed my oilskins I bore no resemblance whatever to a deserter.

The keeper of that hotel was an Afrikander, not in love with Portuguese, and glad of the chance to unburden himself to ears uncalloused by the constancy of such refrains.

"An Englishman's one chance," he said, "if he goes broke in this place, is to appeal to his consul. He can never do anything for you at the time: there are too many broken Englishmen for the consulate funds to cover a tenth of the cases. But if a ship should put in short of hands he'll get you out of jail and have you sent aboard to work a passage to somewhere else. So, if you go broke, mind you tell him before the Portuguese arrest you as a vagrant."

He little guessed what vinegar he was pouring into open wounds! I was minded to try that jail rather than the fo'castle of the *Heatherbell* again.

"Why talk of going broke?" I asked with the bravest air I could summon. He and I were eating breakfast at the same table, and I was trying to disguise my craving for Christian ham and eggs.

"Because none but a Portugee, or a man

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on contract, or a merchant with more money than morals can hope to get a living here! I could tell you tales that would make you sick! They'll skin you of your last coin—what they can't steal they'll take in taxes—and then arrest you as a vagrant and throw you in the jail to starve."

"And the cost of living here is——?"

"At this hotel? A pound a day."

I made a swift calculation: Ten pounds= ten days=jail!

"No jobs to be had?" I asked.

He jeered at the notion.

"Black boys—natives do the menial work. Chinese run the laundries, chickens, eggs, and odds and ends. Indians monopolize money-changing and the larger shops. Bank clerks and business managers are all contract men from home. Greeks do the fishing and run restaurants. Portuguese hold all the official jobs. Where's your chance?"

It looked to me as if my chance of jail was pretty obvious. He had no means of guessing the amount of my resources, but my facial expression must have hinted that his pessimism was sinking into me.

"Get away from here before you're stranded!" he urged. "Book your passage to British East!"

How should he know that I had not enough to take me up to British East!

"I'll look around first," I said, screwing up courage again.

"Don't say I didn't warn you!" he answered. "Shall you stay here?"

"Let you know later," I told him; and I paid him for the breakfast and went out.

THE first thing I did was to walk all over the town. They were laying the trolley-line in those days, and the street corners were ablock with construction material and gear. While I watched one party at work the English foreman came and tried to sell me an enormous drum of copper wire.

"Yours?" I asked him.

"Of course not! The company's."

"What's it worth?"

"Lord knows! Gimme ten pounds and it's yours to take away!"

By noon, with an unmixed notion of the place's charms I returned to one of the restaurants on the main street that the Afrikander had told me Greeks kept. It was a cheaper place than the hotel. There was nowhere to sit after lunch but in the bar, and the Greek proprietor grew insolent unless one kept a glass at work; but by dint of taking small sips, and pretending to fall asleep at intervals on the shabby plush-covered divan in a corner, it was possible to keep sober, and expenses down to a minimum.

There was nothing for it but to spend some money, for I was tired, and curious besides, to watch and listen, believing I could, perhaps, get a line on opportunity. It was in that way that I met Charles du Maurier, and saw revealed the despicableness of that colonial Government.

I was more actually drowsy than pretending—having had no sleep at all the night before—when I noticed a sudden stir in the street outside, and at the door, and in the café. The men at the bar made room for a newcomer before he appeared on the scene, and three Portuguese officers at a little table on the far side of the door from me ceased talking and looked uncomfortable.

I heard a sharp, disagreeable voice outside, speaking English—nobody except the Portuguese officers spoke any other language in that restaurant—and a moment later a man of middle height strode in, with a hunting-rifle balanced in the crook of his right arm, and a cartridge-bag slung over his shoulder.

"Hello, du Maurier!" said every one at once—except the Portuguese officers. "Glad to see you, du Maurier! Come and have a drink, du Maurier!"

It was obvious that every one desired to have the man's good-will; yet I did not get the impression that he was popular. He was of stoutish build, but looked active as a cat; rather good-looking in a fat-lipped brunette sort of way; and he had cold blue eyes that rested appraisingly on every face in the room in turn. In the course of their casual inspection they fell presently on me.

"Good afternoon!" he sneered, leaning back against the bar and reaching with his free hand for the whisky bottle that the Greek produced without instructions. "How do, stranger? What's your name?"

I did not inform him.

"Ceremonious, eh? Very well—I'll make the introductions. You want to know who I am first, eh? That's natural. But everybody in Lourenço Marques knows me.

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Still—I'll tell! I'm Charlie du Maurier! Charles du Maurier and I are one and the same individual, and now you know! Now everybody knows, and we're all agreeable!"

He filled his glass with neat whisky, and swallowed half the dose at a gulp. Then his eyes traveled past me to the three officers in uniform, whose conversation had so suddenly damped off. One guessed, without knowing details, that they were hesitating between retreat and dignity.

"Aha!" said the du Maurier person, finishing the whisky at a gulp. He was not in the least drunk. "Here are three gentlemen who know me well! Three Portuguese officers, by ——, swords and all! Why don't you up and arrest me, gentlemen? If it's true there's a warrant out for Charles du Maurier, here he is! You've only to come and take him! I'm Charles du Maurier—afraid of no man, and least of all afraid of the Portuguese Government! Come and take me if you dare! Turn out your garrison and take me!"

The three officers rose and went out, omitting to sign vouchers or pay cash, and the Greek set up a great wail. There was a roar of laughter in which du Maurier joined noisily.

"I'll pay for their *vino tinto!*" he volunteered. "Then they can say they've been drinking with Charles du Maurier. They can go to their commandant and brag to him about it! Ha-ha-ha! That's a good joke! Portuguese officers bragging to their commandant, by ——, that they've had a drink with Charles du Maurier! Oh, Lord, that's a good one!"

I not coming forward, and not joining in the rounds of drinks that his arrival was the excuse for, he paid me no more attention except that every once in a while his cold eye fell on me and I knew I was not out of his mind. He stood at the bar, and drank, or refused to drink, with whom he chose, all that afternoon, continuing as sober as a shark but bragging more and louder as his audience grew drunker and its mood less critical. His bragging was mostly of shooting men.

"I don't encourage the devils myself by paying them money," I heard him say more than once. "But the price, if you'll pay in advance, for killing a white man is ten pounds gold, and do the job yourself. A native costs half. That's thirty miles back from the coast, of course. They say there's a zone near here where the tariff's higher!"

The strange part was that nobody appeared to doubt him. Several men nodded acquiescence. Only one or two shook their heads, and I divined that their objection was to his giving such publicity to the facts, rather than to the facts themselves.

"What are you doing for a living now?" somebody asked him at about supper-time; and he laughed with a hard, dry cackle that made my blood run cold.

The brutality aboard ship had been unalloyed and shameless, but it had been born, one might say, of necessity and took no joy in itself; but this man du Maurier loved cruelty for its own sake, and the very lack of mercy was the essence of a joke to him.

"I'll tell you," he sneered. "Don't say I didn't tell you, now! You've heard of the Premier Diamond Mine? You've all heard of that, haven't you? The big new pipe that's made de Beers look like a four-flush—you've heard of that? Well—they haven't even got it paddocked off with barbed wire yet. There are guards here and there, but there's a lot of clay dug and lying in the open to be weathered. The diamonds are sticking out of it like dew in the morning, and there are nearly as many thieves as stones!

"The plan is to get a bag of diamonds, seal 'em up, and trust 'em to a native. He runs with 'em overland to this place, where an Indian buys 'em for the Bombay market, sending a check back through the mail. The game is to lie up in the bush and watch for natives. If you happen to shoot the right one, you get a fine bag o' diamonds, and the Indian 'ud just as soon buy from you as from anybody else! Ha-ha-ha-ha! Good game, what?"

A man who sat beside me—a nondescript individual—recovering from East Coast fever, and probably on board allowance from the concern that hired him—for he had no money to spend, yet was not destitute—leaned and whispered in my ear.

"If that was really his game, he'd not be telling it," he argued. "But if he hadn't done it he wouldn't trouble to pretend he had—he's that proud and original! It'ud be like him, the cold-hearted swine, to skin all there was in the game and then set others on to trying it! That'ud be like him, that would!"

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I WENT to supper, and to bed above the restaurant; and having slept so many months in the *Heatherbell's* abominable fo'castle, it needed more than the babel of that barroom to keep me awake. The clean sheets and the open window were paradise by comparison; and although the morals of the *Heatherbell* seemed, looking back, like those of a Sabbath-school compared to what Lourenço Marques boasted, I reminded myself that corruption came from within and not without a man, and was not troubled much on that score.

My dreams that night were brilliant, and I awoke a little after dawn feeling under my skin the tingle of unborn happenings. Any one who has chanced his arm must know that tingling. It comes as a rule when hope has no excuse, and invariably presages good fortune. I have known men to own to the tingling, and yet go down, but that was because their courage failed them, not because inspiration lied.

But, although board and bed at that Greek place cost less than half the hotel price, it was obvious enough that yet more economical quarters must be found at once, if I hoped to keep vagrancy and the jail in the offing while I hunted a job of sorts. Life and the talk at sea gives a man strange notions, and after breakfast, and some thinking, no amount of argument could have persuaded me that it was impossible, or even unwise, to camp out on the outskirts of the town.

I saw the man du Maurier at the other end of the long table in the dining-room, and flattered myself that he did not notice me. I managed to slip out without having word with him, and—careless of direction, provided I left the town behind—set out for what are known as Kilos One and Two. Those are fills alongside the harbor, of which the Portuguese are quite inordinately proud—an acre or two of level land where swamps once were, held at enormous prices for factory and dock sites, in the belief that Delagoa Bay was destined to be the greatest, richest, busiest harbor in all Africa. A strange delusion! But all the real estate in that part of the world is held for a fabulous rise on fabulous excuses, and the Governments are as sanguine as the down-and-outs.

It looked a good enough place to camp on, and I spied an old abandoned wagon with broken wheels, whose top was mostly watertight. A little sailor lore, a little luck in finding jetsam—perhaps an old sail, and doubtless some timber along the foreshore—an hour or two's work, and I would have that abandoned wagon fit to live in.

I sat down on its broken tail-board to think out how best to tackle the task, and was growing more and more pleased with the treasure-trove when, to my sudden disgust, I saw the man du Maurier, gun on his arm as usual, sauntering along toward me. There was no use in trying to avoid him. He was coming straight in my direction. I did not doubt he had followed me from the Greek's place.

"Considering things?" he asked as soon as he came within talking distance.

I nodded, and he came and sat beside me on the wagon, chewing tobacco and spitting at remarkably regular intervals.

"See that snake?" he said presently.

I followed the direction of his eyes, and after staring through the glare for a minute or two I could just distinguish a little dark snake upreared above some twigs a hundred yards away.

"Ever see their heads cut off with a bullet?" he asked, and he brought the rather heavy-bored rifle to his shoulder.

He did not aim long, nor did he fire twice. The snake disappeared.

"Go and look at it," he said; and principally because I was glad of the excuse to leave his side I got up and walked to where the snake had been.

Sure enough, its head was severed cleanly and the body lay squirming in the sun.

"Did I hit it?" he called, and I turned to nod to him, only to discover that he was reloading his rifle and had it pointed at me.

There was no cover. Whichever direction I might take he would have a clear view of me against an open background at short range. He had not raised the rifle, but his eye was on me, and the sensation was as mortifying as if he had deliberately taken aim. I decided on the instant to choose the lesser of two evils and call his hand, preferring, if I must be shot, to take it in the face.

So I walked toward him, as casually as I could contrive. I could see his finger on the trigger, and his cold eye never left me for an instant, but he did not shoot, and presently I stood within six feet of him.

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Then he grinned, rather approvingly, I thought.

"You're a man of nerve!" he said, with his objectionable nasal snarl. "Most men would have made for town as fast as their legs 'ud carry them, beginning slowly for the sake of dignity, but running as soon as the range was in their favor. I wouldn't have shot you! What should I shoot you for? I've nothing against you. I don't want your money!"

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him I hadn't any money, but some trick of fortune determined me instead to hold my tongue and find out what his game might be. Surely he had not followed me so far for nothing.

"But you're a young fool!" he added. "I've known more than one man to lose his life by turning his back that way on a rifle. Let me tell you something: when one gentleman has a loaded rifle, another gentleman should walk behind him! When two gentlemen have rifles they walk side by side, or else each sees the other unload! That's bush law. What were you doing out here?"

"As you suggested, considering things," I answered.

"There's mighty little here that's worth considering!" he sneered. "This is no place for a greenhorn. More men without money come ashore here and end up in the jail than in any other port in Africa! Oh, you can't fool me! You've an English university accent, and your kind don't put up at Greek hotels while you've money left!

"You're hoping to find a job. You won't find one, because there ain't any! You can't get away, either, and I'll tell you how I know. Your kind no more like the looks o' this place than a parson likes the breath of hell. If you'd had any money, you'd have gone away again on the same boat. Which boat did you come by?"

To have answered truthfully would have been to put myself entirely in the blackguard's power. He could either have had me arrested then as a deserting seaman, or have held the threat over me. Yet I resented the notion of having to lie to the brute, so I answered nothing.

"None o' my business, eh? All right, you can't offend me. I'm good-natured, I am, and everybody knows it. Charlie du Maurier's not the man to take offense because a gentleman won't answer questions. Let me tell you something, though. You've got no money. Mighty soon the Portuguese 'll find that out. Next thing, they'll arrest you. Next, you're in jail! Know what happens after that?"

I was not sure whether or not he was playing with me on the cat-and-mouse plan. He seemed to be amusing himself at my expense, and I did not question that the mere chance of being cruel would be sufficient excuse in his eyes. But there was a suggestion of ulterior motive, and I rather suspected he was probing in his own way for information.

"There are worse towns than this one," I answered, because that was the most colorless statement I could think of.

"Perhaps," he retorted, "and perhaps not!" There was a cold gleam in his eye. "But there are no worse jails than this one! It's lousy, and they starve you, and it's dark, and it stinks! And when you've been in there a while so that every one has forgotten you, d'you know what they do?"

"Can't imagine," I said, interested against my will.

"They sneak you out in irons at night onto one of their lousy little coastwise steamers and nobody ever hears of you again."

"Drown you at sea?" I suggested, for he waited for me to hazard some kind of guess.

"Drown you at sea!" He laughed like a hyena. "Not they; they're a practical gang. They ship you to the West Coast—the Portuguese West Coast—and put you to work with the coco slave gangs, bossing up natives. Refuse to drive natives and they shoot you!"

I thought I saw through the weakness of that proposition, and was swift to point it out, being yet inexperienced in the practical wisdom of keeping such thoughts to myself.

"Nobody could make a decent fellow do a dirty act by threatening to shoot him. He'd let them shoot and be ——!"

Du Maurier threw his head back and cackled like a champion egg-laying hen.

"You think they're —— fools, don't you? Why you—you chicken! They keep a man everlastingly hoping to escape! They keep him believing each trip with a new gang is his last one! He has to drive the natives to save the natives' lives. And he hopes to get away in order to expose conditions! They work on a bad man's badness, and on a good man's goodness—get you both going and coming. Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

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"If this is such an awful place—such a bad Government," I answered, "why do you stay here? Why don't you go to British territory, where law is law, and the king's writ runs, as they call it?"

AT THAT his face darkened as if I had deliberately insulted him, and the steely glint in his cold eyes reminded me—although I can't imagine why—of butchers' shops.

"I guess you don't know I had a little difference with the British?" he said, patting his rifle, and eying me like a chisel.

"I don't know anything about you," I answered frankly.

He judged I was telling truth, and nodded. The storm died as swiftly as it came, and he was all smiles once more—hard, merciless smiles, finding humor in the stones where none was.

"There are tales, and all kinds of tales about me," he said. "Believe 'em or not, as you like. I'll tell you this, though: the Portuguese let me alone! They arrested me once, up in Chai Chai."

"Where is Chai Chai?" I asked him.

"Capital of Gazaland—up the Limpopo a day from here by steamer, or rather a night and part of a day. There's the steamer—look at her!"

He pointed out a small seagoing tug—that lay alongside the nearest quay, busily filling her shallow hold with barrels.

"They wanted me for murder, or so they said. I guess they just wanted me, and the heaviest charge was the best excuse. At any rate, they came and took me by surprise in my tent at dawn, and locked me up in Chai Chai fort. But I had my best natives along, and one of them gave the Portuguese the slip.

"They'd reckoned without my eleven brothers, all living, and five cousins within call. The morning after, all my brothers and cousins rode in from the Libomba Hills—sixteen men. They disarmed the soldiers—burned the fort—loosed me—and tied the fort commandant hand and foot. Then they hitched him to a tree with a rope about his neck, and hauled on the rope until he stood on tiptoe. I was for flogging him, but my brothers said that would bring about counter reprisals; so we left him in that position and rode away.

"Since then the Portuguese treat me with respect. They no more dare take me again than they dare invade British territory with their tin-pot army! I'm King of Gazaland, I am, from the edge of the Lourenço Marques swamps to Pearson's Place, and I'd like to meet the Portugee who dare deny it!"

"Tell me about Chai Chai," I said, since he seemed disinclined to go away.

"It's a rotten hole. Sharks, crocodiles, and hippo—drunken natives, mosquitoes, flies, malaria, mangrove swamps, pineapples, and the worst officials in the country! But it's on the way to my place, if you care to take the longest route. And it's on the way to Inambane and other places. A man can walk from Chai Chai to Inambane in three weeks; and if he hasn't any money or baggage the blacks and Portuguese won't rob him!"

"Anything doing at Inambane?" I asked, and he laughed as if I had made a good joke.

"Less than here, unless you want death and corruption. There's more of those!"

"Does the steamer go there today?" I asked, and he laughed again.

"Sure enough. Today's the day. Say—listen!" He patted his rifle again. "You're broke—I can tell that with half an eye. You're minded to look at Chai Chai—a blind man could see you are. Well—when you get there you'll see I told the truth. From there to my place in the Libomba Hills is roughly a hundred miles. All the natives know my place. Ask them for Charlie du Maurier and they'll point you the way. It's a mean way. It runs 'round the edge of the swamps; and there are lions, and snakes—mosquitoes—flies—all the fun of the fair.

"But if you're a genu-ine white man you can make it! The natives'll let you sleep in their huts, and they'll feed you locusts and wild honey same as John the Baptist ate—there's a famine all through Gazaland and mealies are scarce, but there's plenty at my place. If you dare, and win through you've got guts! If you've got guts, I can use you! If you reach my place in the Libomba Hills I'll put you in the way of making a good living!"

"I'll remember," I answered, turning to go, and he swung along beside me, whistling and nodding in time to the tune as if his thoughts were of Springtime and merry-making. Nor could I shake his company.

He walked with me to the Greek's place, and thence to the steamer office, where he

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roundly abused the Portuguese clerk until that unhappy individual sold me a one-way ticket to Chai Chai at half price. Then he went with me to the little steamer, making one of his own native servants carry my belongings, and he bullied the Goanese steward until I had one of the minute cabins to myself.

"Mind you!" he said again, as they poled the old tug away from the quay. "It's a hundred miles to my place! If you should ever reach there, I'm your friend! I'll give you a week's start, and go the short way up the Tembe River. Bet I'll beat you!" And he stood watching me until he seemed only a speck on a wall in the distance.

It was a weird sensation, being appraised and, so to speak, appropriated by that cold-blooded brute. I had no idea of ever seeing him again, and would have walked a thousand miles in the wrong direction rather than deliberately cross his trail. My secret plan was to walk to Inambane, in hope of meeting luck either there or on the way, calculating that the eight pounds odd that I had remaining would in any case take me on from Inambane to Beira, where there would be a different consul, and other ships in the offing than the decrepit *Heather-bell*. But I felt creepy at the thought of having accepted even information from du Maurier, and before we reached the river mouth I had checked up every detail of it by talking with the other passengers.

AND that was a weird voyage—a wonderful voyage if only the dread of destitution had not so overhung the venture. We steamed close inshore by mangrove swamps to the shallow Limpopo mouth, and lay for a night there on the thundering bar with the noises of a neolithic age about us. Once a lion roared on the high bluff over the far bank; and from among the mangroves there came crashing, and wild screams, plunging and tearing, ripping and thrashing, and—at intervals—a silence so complete and unexpected that it hurt the ear-drums.

The cockroaches drove me out of the cabin, and the mosquitoes sought to drive me in again. Of the two evils I chose the deck and the beauty of moonlight and cool air, and watched until dawn sucked up the mists and showed a military hospital, white and lonely, hugging the shore by the bar. Who chose that site for such a place, and why, is a mystery I never solved.

We dropped a dozen barrels of the stuff they call red wine, and passed on up-river. Great sharks followed us for miles—one followed all the way to Chai Chai, where the hippos thought the water fresh enough and wallowed down to meet him. There were crocodiles in hundreds sunning themselves on rocks and logs, and birds of every color and size and cry perching on mangrove poles, or wheeling to scream abuse at us.

But the chief interest was the atmosphere of mystery. It was up this river that King Solomon's adventurers most likely came to make the old diggings in the distant hills, and the sensation was of being present at the dawn of history. Barring the mangrove stakes set at uncertain intervals to mark the drift of sand, there was no trace of man's handiwork—not a native in sight—not a boat—not a beast.

The other passengers were three hundred Kafirs crowded on the lower deck, on their way back from the Transvaal gold-mines; four Goanese Government clerks, nearly bursting with the pride of having "first-class" cabin berths; and a Portuguese tax-gatherer, with his black wife and a swarm of their half-breed children.

He assured me he was married to the lady, and introduced me to her with punctilious ceremony; but he treated the Goanese as if they were dogs without licenses, and objected loudly to being obliged to eat in the same saloon with them.

He asked me my business, and I wasted an hour in an effort to deceive him without telling out-and-out lies. I might as well have tried to deceive myself as to what the breakfast hash was made of—I, who with my own eyes had seen the poor goat killed.

"I, Eduardo Lopez," he assured me at last, "can tell you more about Gazaland than any other man. There are three authorized occupations for a European who is not an official. Prospector you are not, for you have no license. It is I who sign the licenses. I know. Hunter you are obviously not, for you have no guns, no tent, no servants, and—again, no license! It is also I who sign the hunters' licenses! Trader in mealies you are also evidently not, and for two reasons—it is not the season; there are no mealies. And again, you would require a license, and I—whose business that would be—have issued

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none! Here is my book of licenses—here is another. Here are yet others. Your name is in none of them!"

"Surely," I said, "a man needs no license to travel and look about him?"

"In Gazaland," he answered smugly, "it is always well to have a permit of one sort or another. It confers a sort of semi-official standing. It ranks one above the native, and the Indian, and the Goanese. It entitles one to respect, and to a certain measure of confidence. It is presumptive evidence of bona fides.

"Let me issue one to you. My services will cost you nothing, and a trader's permit, let us say, would be only twenty-five pounds—a bagatelle—good for six months. Taxes are payable in Portuguese money, but you may pay me in English gold and I will make the exchange when I return to Lourenço Marques."

I thanked him for the advice, and promised to think it over.

"If you were wise, you would jump at the opportunity!" he answered, with rather a sneer under his black mustache and a mean look in his eye. "That man du Maurier I saw you with is a low person of very bad reputation. You would better bolster yourself up with semiofficial standing! Englishmen who have no permits are not welcome in Gazaland!"

"I'll think it over!" I assured him, and he sneered again and left me, to go and talk in undertones with the Portuguese captain, who was drunk and steered atrociously. Every time we missed a corner of the winding river by a margin of six inches the Kafirs on the lower deck all laughed, and to the birds we must have seemed a picnic party bent on self-immolation for their benefit.

They followed and screamed at us as if in haste to get the disaster over, and our bones picked before dark. But the captain, and his half-breed crew, and the tax-collector with his coal-black señora, talked on, and passed a bottle 'round, as if the treacherous river were an open road, and they on metal rails.

Chai Chai came into view beyond a bend at noon, and its excuse for being greeted the nostrils instantly. There is neither mistaking nor forgetting the vile, acrid stench of the barreled stuff the Portuguese call *vino tinto*, that they sell to the natives of that miserable land. Its only resemblance to wine is its murky red color, which may or may not be aniline.

But international law lays down that spirits shall not be sold to natives between certain parallels, and there is more in a name than Shakespeare hinted at. A barrel of the beastly stuff will keep a dozen natives drunk for half a month, and they will work for the sake of it. So three thousand barrels of it went to Chai Chai every thirty days; our tug did a roaring business; and Chai Chai, except for the "fort," was three or four barns of concrete and corrugated iron, all devoted to one purpose.

There were mealie plantations in sight; and two of the planters' houses graced the hillside looking down on the muddy river—cool, they looked, and prosperous; but the locusts had eaten every green thing on either river bank, and the few lean goats and cows licked up and ate the living insects.

The one exception was the pineapples. Fields and roads were all marked out with the prickly plants, and for some reason the locusts scorned those, so that the land was a wilderness of reddish brown, marked with irregular lines of green, and punctuated by the skeletons of leafless trees.

The fort was a mud-walled rectangle down near the river bank, enclosing fifty round, thatched huts and an iron storehouse at one end. In one or two places the ditch had been allowed to fill from neglect. Three or four Portuguese soldiers in ragged uniforms lounged in the shade of a tree, and there was a general air of hungry shabbiness. But the Portuguese flag fluttered bravely from a crooked pole, and the one officer in sight strutted in a uniform whose whiteness was simply dazzling.

For the rest, there were half a dozen Indian stores facing a sandy road—corrugated-iron affairs with open fronts, where matches, thin cotton blankets, and enameled pots were displayed to catch the native eye. And there was a jail—an undoubtable, unspeakable jail, with iron bars, an armed sentry and a smell.

The sun beat down on all this in a splendid effort to melt the iron roofs, and there was only one redeeming spot in sight. The planters' houses, that might otherwise have graced the unlovely scene, only added to the desolation by the insolence of their contrast to all that misery. They were

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built on the profits of native labor paid for with *vino tinto*, and unexplainably they smirked, and looked, the part.

BUT—and my eye fell on these with the instinct that impels a drowning man to grasp at flotsam—beyond the fort, on a little rise by the river bank, were two white tents. They were clean, dazzling, well-constructed tents, with an air about them of self-respect. I reasoned that if they were Portuguese they would almost certainly belong to the Government, and in that case a Portuguese flag would have been in evidence.

But there was no Portuguese flag. Whichever way I looked there was no other pleasant thing in sight, and those tents drew me like a magnet. I walked down the crazy gang-plank and wandered toward them—they were half a mile away—with the sensation of having been reprieved. They were big tents, with awnings out in front, and presently I could see chairs under the awnings, and in one chair a man who, from his dress and attitude, could only have been English.

As I approached within clear view I heard him call to some one in the other tent.

"Monty! Hey, Monty! Didums, d'you hear? Come out, you lazy rascal! I say, Monty—here's an Englishman!"

I walked up to the tent, and he rose to meet me—not so gray then as now, but iron-gray, nevertheless, with the same upturned mustaches, and the same way of standing as if there were a rapier in his right hand. I told him my name, and he told me his was Oakes—Frederick Joliett Oakes.

"Perhaps you've heard of me from the Portuguese?"

But I had not.

"This is Lord Montdidier," he said, as another tall man came from the other tent, as clean-limbed and as cleanly clothed as he, but darker—a gray-eyed man, with a rather heavy, dark mustache, and a neck and shoulders that suggested polo instantly.

He wore a white silk shirt, partly open, showing skin burned to a nut-brown. The rolled-up sleeves showed forearms as lithe and clean as those of the sculptured Hermes. He was a younger man than Oakes, with a rather gentler smile, and the air about him of the English upper class, that knows it is immortal and is far too tactful to be self-assertive.

They ordered a native to bring another chair, and made me sit down facing them.

"You're rather an astonishing apparition!" said Oakes. "You arrive like the god out of a box in the old Greek plays. We weren't exactly praying, and we had given up hope, but we would rather see an Englishman just at this minute than any other unexpected thing we can think of."

"You'll stay to lunch, of course?" said Lord Montdidier.

"I wonder what you're doing here?" said Oakes.

"None of our business, of course," said Lord Montdidier.

"We're prospectors," said Oakes.

"May I order you a drink?" said Lord Montdidier.

"Doing?" I said. "I'm looking for work!"

"Rare!" said Montdidier, shaking his head with a peculiarly gentle smile. "Very rare in these parts!"

"The chance to work seems rare," said I.

"The rarest thing," said Oakes, "is a man who's fit to do what we want done—a reasonably honest man. If there is such a thing in Gazaland, we haven't met him!"

"Shall I shout for the lunch?" said Lord Montdidier.

"How would you like to tell us all about yourself?" said Oakes.

"After lunch," added Lord Montdidier.

"I'd as soon tell you now," said I, but Montdidier shook his head and Oakes yielded the point without demur.

It was easy to see that Oakes was the fiery enthusiast, and Lord Montdidier the more methodical, more patient, rather more formal of the two. Yet they were both men of swift judgment and tremendously strong confidence in their own decisions, as I was destined in the course of years to learn in a thousand ways.

We made a compromise, and I told of myself at the luncheon-table—all spread with snowy linen and white chinaware. The meal was cooked by a Goanese, and served by a Zulu. It could not have been better cooked or served in London town, and as we ate the taint of the *Heatherbell's* fo'castle fell from me, so that I told them of my adventures like a free man to free men, without shame, concealment, or apology.

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Then they asked me questions—leisurely questions, seemingly at random, but nevertheless devised to check me up—courteous, shrewd questions that no upright man could take exception to, and no pretender could have answered.

"He's the gift of God!" said Oakes at last, slapping a resonant thigh.

"Suppose we take his own opinion on that point," Montdidier suggested; and forthwith Oakes did the talking while Lord Montdidier sat back and watched us both.

It seemed they had claims staked out in the Libomba Hills—very valuable claims Oakes called them. But in those days the Libomba Hills were a sort of no-man's land, where no Portuguese governor dared show his face, and the iniquitous Charles du Maurier maintained a sort of medieval baron's government from an ærie, that gave him a view of all approaches.

They had licenses to prospect, but their claims must be registered according to law, and they had returned to Chai Chai only to discover that there was no authority in that miserable fort sufficiently exalted to give them papers. It might be necessary to go even as far as Mozambique—possibly to Lisbon, Portugal.

"So I'm going back to hold the claims, while Monty works the oracle," said Oakes.

"And the whole point is," said Lord Montdidier, "that I won't agree to his returning alone. The man du Maurier, who lives in that nest in the hills, has the natives all terrorized and I should imagine would stoop to anything and stop at nothing. How would you like to make the trip with Mr. Oakes? We would pay you a fair thing."

"I'm in no position to refuse any honest job!" I answered. "I'm at your service, and glad to be."

"Can you shoot straight?" Oakes asked me.

"What does that matter?" said Montdidier. "He can learn. A more important point is, will he obey orders?"

"Why ask a seaman that?" laughed Oakes. "I'll tell you my view of it. He can't refuse a job, and we can't refuse him! We've neither of us an alternative! Let's sign him on for a forty a month and found."

"Agreed," said Montdidier.

"Forty what?" said I.

"Pounds," Oakes answered.

"Done!" said I. "I would have come for half—for a quarter of it! But I accept your offer!"

They both laughed, without seeming in the least upset by having missed a bargain. They were unusual men. Later I learned that they would have taken me on their own terms, at their own appraisal, or not at all. Bargains in human flesh and bone were not in their range of vision.

But Montdidier drew a very careful contract with me on a sheet of foolscap paper, and Oakes read it over three times before we all three signed it. By its terms I was limited to my wages, clothing, transportation, food and tent. I was to have no share in the profits of the trip, whatever those might be, or from whatever source. They were business men, as well as generous employers.

From the moment that paper was signed I was treated as a member of the party—apportioned a rifle and a tent, provided with thorn-proof clothes out of their spare kit, given a native servant, and a mule to ride, and in every way magnificently treated.

I told them the man du Maurier had turned up in Lourenço Marques, and that made Montdidier all the more eager to be moving. Next morning with a final charge to me to guard Oakes from harm more carefully than if he were my sweetheart, he ducked the boot Oakes threw at him and boarded the same little steamer that had brought me. We watched him out of sight, and then Oakes went to the fort to take out a license for me, "as if you were my dog," as he remarked; for that colonial Government omitted no means of imposition, and the more degrading the tax the better.

WE STRUCK camp then with the speed of a clipper ship making sail, crossed the Limpopo on a raft—well watched by crocodiles in case the raft overturn, or a mule or a man fall off—and started on a trip that will linger in memory until memory fails. Being my first experience of low veld, or of any veld at all, it was all good going to me. I felt like a boy on a holiday.

Thorns were amusing—even the wait-a-bit thorn that drags the hide from a mule's legs, and strips a man's clothes off him. Lions, roaring around the camp at night, were as fascinating as the low-hung stars

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and crackling thorn camp-fires. Natives, passed by the way—kraals entered to buy food for our own black following—buck on the short horizon, were all new sources of wonderment to me, and each day's march was crowded full of interest.

I was as happy as the days and nights were long. My ever-rising spirits kept the sun's rays and malaria at bay, and because all natives of Africa are happier when the white man laughs, our boys marched willingly and gave no trouble.

So Oakes was pleased with me. But his own good temper wore thin as march succeeded march. The fever began to threaten him—the low fever of that stricken land, that saps a man's hope and makes his saliva taste in his mouth like aloes. On board ship I had watched the robust good humor of a mate succumb by little notches at a time to the overbearing meanness of a skipper, until the mate himself was the more heartless tyrant of the two.

To some extent I understood how climate, conditions, food and trouble will wear a man's very soul away; but to watch that low-veld loneliness rot into the heart of Oakes was a revelation. Day after day I could see the difference in him, and although he was everlastingly courteous to me I could judge the effort that it cost him now and then. He reached a point where every incident grated on his nerves—every proposal was a lame one—every day's march too long or too short—every night an ordeal to be stoically lived through.

So when we pitched our camp at last under the great cliff in the Libomba foothills, where he and Lord Montdidier had pegged their claims, he was an ailing man, unable to throw off the lassitude of low malaria, yet able enough to torment himself with useless activity. His irritation, manfully though he strove with it, was constantly gaining the upper hand, and at those times our native followers suffered.

One form that his low spirits took more constantly than any other was a sort of morbid interest in the man du Maurier, whose high-perched ærie of a place could just be seen from the opening of his tent.

"That ruffian is as likely as not to thwart us," he prophesied. "He knows well enough there's gold here, and emeralds. He daren't try to work or market it, that's all. He couldn't get even this Government to register a claim in his name, but if he could persuade a more or less reputable citizen to come here and stake, and register, he would try to do business—provided he could first get some sure hold on his partner.

"I suspect he would try to trap his man in some way—plant some disreputable evidence and get ground for blackmail. When we showed up, he rode down here on his mule with three black wives on foot along behind him. He was civil enough in his blackguardly way, but he got no hospitality. He told us we could have title to these claims from himself as King of the Libombas. He cited the old Portuguese law, that having taken to wife the daughter of a chief gives him legal title now to all the land hereabouts since the chief died. He offered us the claims for a thousand pounds, but we didn't trade.

"But he amused Montdidier. Didums was civil to him! 'Pon my soul, if I hadn't been here Didums would have struck a bargain with the brute just for sake of the experience! Strange fellow, Monty—stranger than any man I know! A great reader of character, but a great ass when so inclined! He keeps his hands clean—cleaner than mine are—but he's so —— interested in freaks of character that he'll go almost any length to get acquainted with a new one! He'll burn his fingers some day—mark my words!"

I began to wonder whether I had been marked down by du Maurier as a possible partner in his claims. At least that would have been a plausible reason for persuading me to wander in search of his dwelling in the hills. But my thoughts were soon diverted from that or any other drift by trouble with our followers.

Oakes was growing bad-tempered and finding too much fault with them. They began deserting one by one; and Oakes, whose malaria increased, found a new vein of ill-humor, grumbling because Montdidier was so long about sending word of his doings.

"We ought to have heard two days ago," he complained to me one morning. "He was to send us word by runner. Where's his runner?"

"I've heard tales of native runners being shot," said I, and I told him what I had heard du Maurier boast of in the bar in Lourenço Marques.

After that Oakes took his favorite rifle

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from its case and, for all his fever, did such amazing shooting at a dozen different targets that I wondered what his marksmanship could be like with a clear eye and steady hand. Yet his temper grew worse as the days wore on and no news reached us.

At last, I think it was ten days after our arrival on the scene, the spell of that monotony was broken. There was a long shout a little after dawn, and I spied the man du Maurier, with the inevitable rifle over his right arm, riding a mule down the steep path that led from his ærie. There were, however, no black wives behind him and, as far as I could judge, he came alone.

I warned Oakes, and he got dressed in a hurry, in a clean shirt and white sunhelmet, believing no more than Lord Montdidier in appearing ill-clothed before strangers. I took a leaf from his book and snatched a clean shirt from the bagful of reserves.

Du Maurier rode down to our tents and did not offer to dismount, but sat grinning, plainly surprised to see me. Suddenly I remembered Montdidier's warning to guard Oakes carefully. What else was I there for? Yet I sat in a camp-chair like a fool, with no weapon in my lap. I dived into my tent, loaded a rifle, and brought it out.

Du Maurier laughed at me as I resumed my seat in the chair with the rifle across my knees. But I noticed that Oakes had picked up a rifle, too, and that he did not laugh, but glanced approvingly at me. Oakes was in a worse temper than usual, and I think du Maurier suspected it.

"If you had manners you'd get off your mule!" Oakes told him at last.

And without a word du Maurier dismounted. Two of our natives ran out and led the mule away, and du Maurier took a seat on a rock that faced our tents. He had a paper in his hand that I think he wanted us to notice and be perplexed about, for he folded and unfolded it and turned it over.

I am not good at psychology. In fact, Oakes maintains that a Mexican rebel in a good suit could make me believe him honest. But the thought occurred to me that du Maurier's surprise at seeing me was all assumed. I imagined the natives had told him there were two white men in camp, not one; and there were not so many Englishmen in Gazaland that he could not have put two and two together, once he knew—and supposing he did know—that Montdidier had gone to Lourenço Marques by way of Chai Chai.

I suspected the air of surprise was assumed to cover an entirely different attitude. Probably it was designed to throw Oakes off his guard, fever and worry having reduced him to a condition perfectly familiar to men acquainted with that country.

"TWO of you!" he said at last, letting his rifle fall into the crook of his arm, and pulling out his pipe. "Why didn't you come up to my place on the hill, and treat me as I'd have treated you? Why stand off, as if you and I weren't friends?"

"We're comfortable where we are, thank you," Oakes answered. "I preferred to stay here and keep an eye on our pegs."

"That young man," said du Maurier, pointing a thumb at me, "has a direct invitation to come and stay in my house. He's my guest by rights! He and I had a talk in Lourenço Marques. He and I are friends! He and I have a plan we were to work together. I own all this land hereabouts, you see, and I've been looking for a partner who would register my goldfield. Having a little difference of opinion with the Portuguese, I'm not in position to register claims myself, but that young man and I could work the trade between us."

"Ask him if he wants to go in partnership with you!" said Oakes.

"I ask questions as and when suits me!" du Maurier answered. "I'll ask you one first. What would you do, supposing that young man and I should go in partnership to own these claims you've pegged?"

"I'd shoot him!" said Oakes promptly, and the answer surprised me as much as it did du Maurier.

"Pity to spoil such a nice young gentleman so early!" du Maurier grinned. "What if there's two of us to one of you, though?"

"How d'you mean?" said I.

"I mean," said du Maurier, "that I've a writing here that says—look, it's all done with a typewriter so's nobody can say I wrote it out myself over Lord Montdidier's signature—I've a writing here that says Montdidier is sick in Lourenço Marques, and sick of prospecting, and sick of Gazaland."

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He was about to say more, but stopped to watch our faces. He may have read astonishment in mine. In Oakes' he saw exasperation fed by the fever in his veins.

"What would you say," he went on, "if I was to prove to you that Mister Lord Montdidier had registered these claims in Lourenço Marques, and in consideration of a thousand pounds, paid and received in presence of two witnesses, had made over the papers in blank to me, for me to fill in the name of any man I choose?"

Oakes glowered, and did not answer.

"Supposing I showed you the papers, what would you say?"

"You couldn't show them! I wouldn't look at them!" growled Oakes.

"And supposing I showed you here—in writing— all typewritten out and signed—an order by Lord Montdidier to me to take his belongings, and pack and forward them to a certain address he gave me?"

"I wouldn't believe it," said Oakes, in a level voice that was much more impressive than if he had roared.

"Yet here is the order!" announced du Maurier, waving a sheet of foolscap paper on which were several lines of typewriting, and a large seal.

"Touch a thing in this camp if you dare!" said Oakes simply.

"Wait a while!" said du Maurier. "I'm not through yet. There's more explanations due! You don't think your bosom friend Mister Lord Montdidier would do such a thing, but you see, I've played a trick on you. You think you're two to one and could outshoot me, but that young man is already wavering in his mind!" He pointed at me with his thumb again. "He isn't half sure he'd draw a trigger on me to oblige you, seeing he knew me first! And the trick I played on you was a smart one. Mister Lord Montdidier doesn't believe you're his friend any more!"

He lit his pipe nonchalantly, affecting to take his eyes off us, but I was watching him like a hawk and was quite sure that was only a ruse to draw our fire in case we should think of shooting. He was probably confident of being able to outmaneuver the two of us, even at that range and conceding us the drop.

"And as for shooting," he said, throwing away the match and resuming his stare at us with increased insolence, "if you did shoot me—if you could shoot me—I suppose you're not forgetting that the natives hereabouts are mine, and that they'd burn you alive for any harm done me? You shouldn't forget that, for that's a strong point! I've married into nine tribes hereabouts! I've nine wives up the hill there! Their relations consider me the big asset, and they'd surely be resentful of any harm done me. You shouldn't think of shooting me. It wouldn't pay! There'd be no profit in it!"

So far there had been nothing said that in my judgment would make for real trouble. His remarks about me were a joke, due to ignorance. If he chose to suppose me a scoundrel like himself, so much the greater surprise in store for him. I was quite sure Oakes would take no stock in his remarks. But he had not played his trump-card yet.

"You see," he said, "I'm a downy bird, I am. When you came here and pegged, I was willing to make a trade with you, but you refused. Whoever refuses to trade with me on my terms makes his own bed, and lies on it, that's all! I knew one of you 'ud have to go to the coast to try and register; so I went there ahead of you, and waited. Then along comes Mister Lord Montdidier, looking pretty sick. I gave him several days to register the claims, for the Portuguese are slow, and then I called on him. He doesn't think much of you any more, Montdidier doesn't!"

Now I saw the length and breadth of his position, and really began to tremble for the consequences. How should I know, who had known Montdidier only a few hours, that the swift low fever of the lands had not made a mental wreck of him, as it had nearly made one of Oakes? True, I was sure I would stand by Oakes until whatever the end might be; but how could I know whether Oakes in his heart did not doubt my loyalty. Oakes had not known me long. I was a stranger in a land where neither law nor mercy kept the right-of-way. Unless Oakes, fever or no, should prove adamant, it began to look to me as if du Maurier held a winning hand.

"Maybe you recollect," said du Maurier, "that the day after you got here you sent a runner to the coast with a letter for Mister Lord Montdidier. Well—he didn't go far, that boy didn't, before he fell into my hands, letter and all! Two of my men brought him to Lourenço Marques. He and I had a conference. We arranged between us that I should hold his wife—I had

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her already in my kraal up there—and he should say what I told him to in case he hoped to get his wife back in condition to be any use to him.

"We came to an agreement pretty soon, and that boy stayed with me in Lourenço Marques—finally coming with me to see Montdidier. Montdidier recognized him, of course, and the boy was word perfect. Between us we told a tale that disgusted Mister Lord Montdidier to the point of saying he'd shoot you at the first sight! I'll tell you what I said, and what that boy confirmed."

Oakes had been pale with the fever, but I noticed now that a dull flush of rage had colored his face, and his eyes would have scared me if I had had to face them. But du Maurier seemed to me to be regarding him as he might a trapped animal, amused at the spectacle of ferocity that could not reach him.

How he was so confident that we two would not shoot was beyond me, until it occurred that he might have a score of blacks in ambush among the rocks behind him, and I began to search for a glimpse of black skin or a spear head, although without avail. I have come to the conclusion since that he was depending entirely on his knowledge of the reluctance of an Englishman to shoot without first giving warning.

"We explained to Mister Lord Montdidier, that boy and I did, that you'd gone! We said you were sick—not very sick in health, but sick of the whole business, and that you'd decided to trek through to Swaziland and leave him to do as he pleased. We said you'd sent that boy to say that Mister Montdidier's things were lying where you'd left 'em on the veld; and I added that I held myself responsible that none of the blacks hereabouts would touch a thing. I promised him that, and that if they did touch anything I'd see he got it back.

"Well—I've seen angry men, but he was the angriest! He didn't believe a word at first, but the native's tale convinced him. I'd drilled that boy until he was word perfect. And finally I bribed a Goanese Government clerk to go to him and say word had come in from the natives that his tent and belongings were left lying on the veld, and what was to be done!

"Oh, we had him convinced all right! And his anger was the terriblest thing I've seen. He swore he will shoot you, and this gentleman here along with you, at the first glimpse he gets; and he's off to Swaziland, by rail to the British border, to look for you!"

He lit his pipe again, that had gone out during that triumphant recital, and watched for a minute to judge the effect produced.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked with a leer. "Are you going to get out and leave this gentleman," once more he pointed at me with the appropriative thumb, "and me to strike a bargain between ourselves? My advice to you is to get out of the country, by Inambane or somewhere, before Mister Lord Montdidier gets wind of you and hunts you down! What'll you do?"

"I'll make no terms with you, anyhow!" growled Oakes. "Get out of my sight!"

Du Maurier laughed.

"I'll give you until tomorrow dawn to think it over!" he announced. "Then I'm coming down with my men to take possession of Mister Lord Montdidier's belongings and to pack them, and deal with them as directed! No, I won't take a drink, thanks!" he added sarcastically. "No, thanks, I won't stay to lunch! And if you're man enough to shoot me in the back as I ride away, let's see you do it! I'll have my mule, if your boys are through with admiring it!"

OUR natives, at a shout from Oakes, brought him the mule and he rode away. I sat in silence, for there was very little I could say that would have helped.

"Have you paper and a pencil?" Oakes asked after a few minutes, and I hunted until I had found them. He wrote out a few words, and handed the paper to me.

"Read!" he said.

I read:

If you want your things come and get them.
FRED OAKES.

"That's a telegram. Take it to Chai Chai," he ordered, "as fast as you can travel. See it dispatched, and make sure it gets there. Then come back!"

It was addressed to Lord Montdidier at the only big hotel.

"I was to guard you," I objected—and then checked myself, remembering that

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those instructions had been received from Lord Montdidier.

"I suppose I needn't remind you that you receive a salary for obeying orders?" he asked. Then he relented, judging, I suppose, that my objection had been solely on his own account. "You see that rising ground among the rocks?" he asked, and I looked toward a sort of island a half mile from the nearest hill, perhaps fifty feet higher than the level land surrounding it. Judging by the splurge of green below it there was a spring of water, and there was no place within rifle range from which an enemy could snipe. "I shall move camp this morning, and pitch up there. You'll find me there when you return. Don't waste any more time."

I was not afraid of the climate. It takes time for the pestilential low veld to sap a man's strength. I was young, and strong, and scarcely rid of the sea air in my lungs. So I took a mule and one native—to make sure I should not lose myself—and was in the saddle and away within fifteen minutes of receiving orders.

The pace I set was exactly as fast as the native could possibly manage and the mule endure, and I overdid the thing rather than waste time. So that when night shut down on us I had a spent mule and an utterly weary servant, and we were all three utterly grateful for the shelter of a big kraal that lay a little to the right hand of the track. I had turned into it, and the natives were about dragging the brush obstruction across the entrance behind me, when I noticed there was another party of travelers encamped there.

None too pleased—for I thought it might be a Portuguese official party, and that could only mean many questions and delay—I took the mule's saddle off, watered him from a woman's crock, and fed him from the bag I had slung from the saddle. That done, I walked forward to find the head man and get supper for the native and myself. I saw a white man come striding to meet me through the gloom, and stood still, dumb. But as he came on I was compelled to believe my eyes, and when he spoke at last, cheerily, there was no denying him—Lord Montdidier!

Without a word I passed him the telegram. It was growing pitch-dark, so he struck a match and read it.

"Oakes wrote this?" he asked.

"Yes."

"On your way to Chai Chai to send it?"

"Yes."

I thought for a second he was going to ask me for an explanation, but I wronged him.

"My spare mule!" he shouted, and I saw his boys come running out of a hut to do his bidding.

He must have bought new mules at Lourenço Marques and have brought them with him on the tug.

"You're not going tonight?" I asked.

"Going now," he answered.

"But—lions!" I objected.

"Please bring my outfit along tomorrow," he answered. "You'll find cloth and beads—or money if he'd rather—in my bag to pay the head man. Start early, and make it in one day if you can. Good-by!" And he mounted the mule, ordered the obstruction taken from the kraal gate, and was gone—with one faithful native boy trotting with a lantern at his mule's heels.

It took me two days, however, to return, for I had his boys and new purchases to bring along. About three in the afternoon I came in sight of the new camp, and not long after that I made out him and Oakes in two chairs side by side, talking and laughing together as if they had never parted. When I reached them, they were kind to me, but did not refer to what had happened by word or hint; and in those days I was not intimate enough with either man to care to ask personal questions.

IT NEVER did occur to me to ask what happened when they met, until Oakes and I sat together on the club veranda in New York that afternoon and we discussed old times.

"When he showed up, why didn't you shoot him?" I asked, and he sat up with a start, and laughed.

"Because," he said, "I believe in respecting my adversary! I wouldn't stick a pig with a dirty knife, and du Maurier was dirty! I'd made up my mind to ignore every word du Maurier said, and to let Monty pick a fight with me on any ground he chose."

"But Monty was a proud man," I said. "How did he come to forgive your distrust of him?"

"Yes, he was a proud man," Oakes answered. "But there's a Providence looks

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after fools, and Monty never found me out! Just think of that brute du Maurier inventing all those lies! He never even saw Monty in Lourenço Marques! As soon as Monty showed up, he skunked out, covering his trail! Those documents he had were Lord knows what—some old ones!"

"How did you explain that telegram away?" I asked.

"I didn't. Monty explained it for me. He took it to mean that there was trouble—danger. 'If you want your things, come and get them!' He understood he might not find them if he came too late!"

"All the same," said I, and checked myself.

"All the same, what?" demanded Oakes.

"Nothing," I answered. "I was merely thinking."

I was thinking what would be the use of suggesting to Oakes at that late day that Monty divined well enough that Oakes mistrusted him, but was too splendid a gentleman ever to let the knowledge of the secret out.

"TRAMP STEAMER STANDING OUT, SIR!"

BY JAMES V. MURRAY

Tramp, tramp, tramp!
With a clash and a crash they rise and fall,
The shining steel beams of the engines tall;
Whirling the cranks that turn the screw
That speed our old freight drogher over the blue.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!
The din of machinery's music to me,
As we stand down the bay toward the open sea.
Bound for the ports below the line—
"Here, with that oil! Hear that bearing whine?"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!
With boiler tubes clean we are on our way,
And a full head of steam we will have today.
The skipper can worry about the rocks;
I want to know why that engine knocks!

Tramp, tramp, tramp!
Starboard and port with a steady tread,
Never off watch whilst there's work ahead.
Our engines are giants, with muscles of steel,
And water and coal is their simple meal.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!
Up to the deck I'll go for a blow;
The shore-line is fading, sure, but slow;
What's that off our beam? A big battle-ship!
Inbound, I guess, from a southern trip.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!
They look mighty slick with their brasswork bright—
And gosh! They look clean in this sunny light!
There they go, yelling and waving their hats!
What's that they're shouting, the sassy young brats?
"Tramp, Tramp, Tramp!"

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THE SPLITROCK MINE

By E. E. Harriman

Author of "The Gooseyoke Returns a Call," "A Quick Decision," etc.

VISION a long ridge, rocky, barren, wind-swept, running out to one gigantic knob of rock that had been divided as with an ax, half standing plumb and defiant, half thrown off to an angle of sixty-five degrees. Three hundred feet below the skyline a row of trees that ran along parallel with the ridge and ended in a clump of Douglas fir just short of the line of the split rock.

See half-way up from the trees to the ridge an anchorage for a cable that ran slanting down past the firs to a mill in the depths of a cañon, a cable more than half a mile in length. Below the anchorage, just at the edge of the fir clump, the buildings usually grouped at a mine shaft.

Just where the swinging carriers passed on that great cable, an ore bin with a loading chute. Above this the shaft-house, storehouse, motor shack and other rough buildings. Below, within the limits of the grove of firs, the bunkhouse, eating-house and cottage of the superintendent.

Crossing the ridge and coming down to the cluster of buildings, the steel towers and heavy wires of a branch line from the electric-power lines that supply a large city. Tall poles bearing wires that lead out from transformers and run to various points, carrying current that has been stepped down to suit various uses. The hoist, carrier, drills, lighting system, even the cook stoves, all run by electricity. The Splitrock mine was up-to-date and efficient.

It even owned a feud, that adjunct so often thought of as a purely Southern product. It was a life-size and active part of the property and the juice that sent the skip flying up the shaft with a load of ore was no more alert and on the job than the brain that managed the feud. And the board of directors was sore.

Superintendent Barrett felt the weight of their displeasure to a degree that caused him to be reckless of his job. When a committee of three from the board visited the mine and quizzed Barrett as to his failure to quiet the feud, he grew angry and talked back.

"You fellows sit around in easy chairs and pull me to pieces, till you have worked your courage up to the sticking-point, and then you send a bunch up here to pry and poke and ask fool questions, but not a man among you would have the sand to take my place and keep it for one month.

"You don't know what it is to handle a proposition of this kind. You don't know anything about what it does to a man to be on the job every day when he never knows what second he may get it in the neck from some unexpected source. I'm here to run this mine and I'm running it. Take your

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—— feud and handle it yourselves. It is no part of my job to pacify feudists."

Now it so happened that one of the three was Bruce Kirby, son of old Jim Kirby, who had just inherited his father's share in the mine. Bruce was young and he had a hot temper. He flared at the imputation that the directors lacked courage.

"I'll take your job for a month," he said rather heatedly. "I'm no miner, but I've got the sand."

"Easy, Bruce! Easy there!" said Randolph Curran, oldest member of the committee. "We don't want Barrett throwing up his job. If you want to spend a month or six weeks in pacifying old Jim Armstrong, just go ahead and do it, but Barrett holds his job."

"I don't care a —— about Barrett's job. He has just the same as called us all a pack of cowards and that name doesn't fit me, at least. I'm here to say that I'll tackle Armstrong or any one else, when it is up to me to do it. I'll not sit quiet and let any man say I'm a coward. If Barrett doesn't like my style he can try to make me over to suit his notion. I'll step outside with him right now."

"Back up, Bruce! Barrett didn't mean anything personal. He was just grouching on general principles. Eh, Barrett?"

"I suppose I was, but if Mr. Hothead insists——"

The superintendent stood up and slowly took off his coat. He let it drop in his chair and looked at Bruce.

"If it will clear the atmosphere any and make you feel better, I will do my best to entertain you outside," he said.

Bruce started for the door, but Curran was before him. He caught Bruce by the arms and kept in front of him.

"Bruce, be reasonable. Get your hot temper under control and give Barrett your hand. I insist! Barrett, you have made it worse. Come over here and shake hands with this boy and tell him you were not hitting at him. Confound you two idiots, anyhow!"

Bruce laughed suddenly and gave back a step. Barrett's face lit up with a grin and the two came together with a grip of strong hands.

"Sorry, Kirby. Let it pass, will you?"

"You bet! I'm an ass about getting mad, anyhow."

Curran heaved a sigh of profound relief and mopped his forehead.

"Now if you boys can keep smiling for fifteen minutes I will make a suggestion," he said. "Barrett, suppose you tell Kirby just what this feud is about and what Armstrong has done to you. Then I will make a proposition to Bruce and see if he has the sand to take it."

"It is easy to tell," said Barrett. "Old Jim is a land hog and he has taken up all the land he could hold legally. He tried to get a grip on the bed of the cañon, filed on a claim under the building-stone section, but he was thrown down by the officials. The stone is no good for building and is too far from a market if it was good.

"He has a homestead, two mineral claims, a timber claim and water-power claims on two creeks, but he got feverish over the cañon claim and swore he was being robbed. Then when the company bought Jerry Blake's claim up here and wanted the cañon for the mill, he swore he would get even if we bought that. We got it and built the mill. Now he is trying to get even.

"He has caused trouble with our water supply twice, dynamited the cañon road once, cut down several poles that carried the power line, and raised merry —— in a lot of other ways. The power comes in over steel towers now, so he cuts no more poles, but he is prolific of schemes and we never know where he will hit us next. I say Jim Armstrong does it, but we have no real evidence or proof against him. We just take it for granted that he and his three boys do it."

"Well, Bruce, do you hanker for the job of pacifying Armstrong?"

Curran smiled as he asked the question, a smile that said plainly that he thought the hothead would crawfish. Bruce colored and his eyes grew hot again.

"You can just telephone mother when you get back to town and tell her to pack my mountain togs for a long stay and ship them up to me. I think I shall like the air up here," he said.

Barrett made an impulsive movement toward Bruce and held out his hand once more. Bruce looked at him and the scowl melted off his face. His hand smacked into that of Barrett, neither man speaking a word.

"Now, Mr. Curran, about that new reduction process," said Barrett, and at once went off into a discussion of mining along up-to-date lines. Bruce Kirby sat on the

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edge of his chair and leaned forward to get as much of the process into his noddle as he could. He had a mania for absorbing knowledge and just now he was interested in mining. The discussion held the boards for twenty minutes.

"Now, Kirby," said Barrett, wheeling on Bruce at last, "I shall not let it be known what you are staying for, since that might bring on you some swift vengeance from old Jim. Just say that you are fond of sport and are staying for the fun you can get out of it. I have a good rod and the creeks are filled with trout. Fish till you get tired of fishing. The men will be glad to get the fish to eat."

THAT is how Bruce Kirby came to accept the job of pacifier-in-chief to the Splitrock Mine. He took it with little appreciation of its dangers. In fact, personal danger did not appear probable. A résumé of the past year showed that no life had been endangered as yet, no one injured. Only delay and property damage, conducted on lines that hid the perpetrators effectively.

Bruce wandred from creek to creek, fishing with enthusiasm, for he really loved the sport. To all appearances he had no thought beyond piscatorial enjoyment, but he was learning the lay of the land perfectly.

He located Armstrong and his family, three miles away, on the side of a cañon where Bruce picked some of the largest trout from the stream just below their house. He saw old Jim standing by the corner of his cabin, watching the stranger who whipped the water and took from it so many plump trout. In the door stood Armstrong's wife, lean, tanned, sour of visage and muscular of body.

A little lower down the cañon wall, on a bench covered with oaks and occasional pines and cedars, the three sons of Armstrong were at work on a log building. Bruce judged it to be for storage use, though he wondered what they would want to store in such a long building. He looked at his watch, found it nearly noon, and reeled in his line. He walked up to the Armstrong cabin, carrying his creel, and accosted Mrs. Armstrong.

"Madam, could I buy a meal from you? I am as hungry as a wolf."

"We ain't in the habit o' feedin' strangers, but mebbe ye can. Ask Jim," and she waved a hand toward the corner where Armstrong stood.

Bruce turned to the mountaineer with a smile and repeated his question. Old Jim was staring at him intently and his eyes were distinctly hostile. He seemed to control his antagonism by an effort and nodded a surly agreement.

"Set another plate, Jen," he growled to his wife. "Where ye from, stranger?"

"Los Angeles," said Bruce. "Came up on a two-day trip and liked it so well up here that I sent for my things and planned to stay a month or more. Great country for trout."

"Ye-uh! Plenty trout. Though what in —— any one eats them fer, when he can git good hawg meat, is more'n I can see."

Bruce made no reply to this, the old woman coming to the door at this juncture to send a shrill quavering call down to the three at the new cabin. They promptly knocked off work and came hurrying up the slope. It was evident that they were not dyspeptic.

The dinner was good; bacon, potatoes bread and butter, rice pudding and cake, with plenty of strong coffee. The men ate voraciously and in silence, except for requests for more of some dish. When they had satisfied their appetites they leaned back and the oldest son shot a question at Bruce, who had tried to carry on a conversation with the old woman rather unsuccessfully.

"What d'ye do fer a livin' down in Los?"

"I am in the medical college, but this is vacation time for me. I graduate next June and plan to start practising right at home."

"Huh! Practisin' is right," said Harvey Armstrong, the second son. "Practise on every poor son of a gun that comes along with a dollar in his pocket and kill half of 'em."

The other two young men guffawed loudly and old Jim grinned. It was hard for Bruce to cover his resentment, but he did it as best he could. Bill, the eldest son, returned to his questioning.

"Puttin' up over at Splitrock?" he asked.

"Yes. Only place I know of where a man can put up in this part of the world," said Bruce.

"Mebbe so, mister," said Bill. "All I got to say is, you're nestin' with a —— bunch of thieves and blacklegs."

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"Is that so? I didn't know that," said Bruce, looking surprised.

"You know it now," snapped Bill, shoving his chair back.

"I know that is your opinion," corrected Bruce. "I don't know the proof of that assertion. They treat me well over there."

"Uh-huh! Sure they will, but you ain't got ary claim they're needin' right bad just now. That makes a differ. Come on, fellers," and he strode out, with his brothers following.

Bruce tried to get the old couple to talk about their spite, but they shut up completely and he paid for his lunch with a feeling that he had failed in his attempt to appear a disinterested observer. He left the cabin and strolled back down the stream with the eyes of the entire Armstrong family watching him.

"Not a bit of use to try to reason with that outfit," he thought. "I gained one thing, though. I'll know any one of them anywhere I see him in future. That was quite necessary."

THE following morning gave him a chance to observe the methods of the enemy. The skip was bringing up load after load of ore and dumping them in the chute that led to the ore bin. The carrier was filling at the loading chute and swinging off down the slanting cable to the bins at the mill. The mill itself was running full blast and everything seemed in perfect trim. Then there came one flash of blinding light and everything stopped. Something had short-circuited the power line.

Bruce went out with "Squirrel" Catron, the mine electrician, to look for the cause of the short circuit. They found it, four hundred yards from the shaft-house, a wire twisted about a sapling, a stone in the looped and twisted clutch of the other end, and the stone heaved across the wires. A simple trick, known to every city boy and most of those in the country.

"Look at that now," said Squirrel. "Puts us on the blink in two shakes of a lamb's tail, by a little trick like that. I wish that wire had looped around his neck when he threw the stone."

He cut the wire at the sapling and it went singing across the wires to the ground as the stone fell. He gathered it up and held it in a coil as he started back for the mine. Bruce looked about him with a vague idea of finding some trace or trail that would be of value to him later. Squirrel looked back at him.

"Might as well come along," he said. "That sharp always wears mufflers on his hoofs, when he raises the devil with us. Never has left a boot track yet. You may notice that I'm carrying that stone by the wire attached. It may show a finger-print."

A good seventy-five yards away a face moved behind a small and half-hidden crevice among the rocks. A figure started off in the opposite direction, stooping far over to keep hidden. On its feet were gunny-sack mufflers, tied on with buckskin whangs.

"—— 'im! Jest what I thought," muttered Jack, youngest son of Jim Armstrong. "He's a fool city yap, but he's in with them —— —— over at the mine. Jest the kind that blunders into things sensible folks can't find when they hunts."

TWO days later, with the burned motors patched up, things were on the move once more and Bruce was watching the mill from a shoulder of rock that jutted out half-way down the slope. The cable swayed within fifteen feet of his perch on a pinnacle. He had climbed up there rather aimlessly, as a small boy climbs.

Now he sat astride a narrow ridge of rock and sent his gaze out over slope and cañon bottom, over rock and tree and clattering mill. For the moment he had forgotten Armstrong and the feud. He was in the mood to enjoy nature and was just letting himself go.

As he lifted his gaze from the mill, to glance along the farther slope of the great cañon, he caught a movement high up. He looked again and saw some object come bounding down the mountainside. It was a long way across to that other slope and the object looked very small to him. It kept dashing downward, leaping high at times, and he knew it to be a rock, loosened from its bed and charging for the cañon bottom. He saw it leap high, go out of sight among the trees that clothed the slope several hundred yards above the mill. A tree-top swayed, then fell among its brethren.

Other trees trembled and bushes flattened under the advance of that rolling, bounding rock. His ears caught the crashing of its

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progress. He saw it emerge from the trees to a space covered by brush and vines. With a gasp he sat up straight and gripped the rock with both hands, throwing his body forward at the same time. He strained as though lifting a heavy weight.

A long roll with a few small hops, then an uplift of rocks and dirt that sent it rising in a long leap, and the giant missile was hurling itself through the air in a leap of hundreds of feet. Bruce groaned and his groan was lost in the sound of a mighty rending, smashing grind, as the rock went in at the side of the roof facing the south, and came bursting out of the flimsy wooden wall at the north. It chucked into the bank just beyond the mill with a thud that sent a vibration clear up to Bruce, hundreds of feet above.

Bruce threw his right leg back over the ridge, preparatory to a slide to the ground, that he might run down to the mill, but he paused. A thought had struck him and he began to scan that upper region.

"No use. Too far away. Wish I had brought my field-glasses," he told himself. "If that was started by man power, the fellows who did it are well behind the ridge by now, and circling back to their hole."

He finished his delayed slide and climbed down the steep trail. He went first to the inside of the mill to see if any one was hurt. There was great excitement there and one young man was telling his mates how he had been saved by the fact that he had just dropped a tool and stooped to retrieve it when the rock passed over him.

"That —— thing went so close that I felt the wind of it," he said. "If I had been standin' straight it would have taken me about the shoulders. Just look here, now."

He walked around to his former position and looked from the hole in the wall, over to the one in the roof. His face turned paler than ever and he gave a shiver.

"Gosh!" he said. "I bet the cussed thing didn't miss me four inches."

By some miracle the rock had missed any vital part of the equipment and the damage to the mill would be covered by two hundred dollars, but the damage to the nerves of the mill workers was beyond computation. Some one suggested an investigation of the cause.

"I'll bet a month's pay it's just another of Armstrong's stunts," said one. "Why don't the company buy him off? He'll bust some of us into trout bait yet. Me, I gotta bellyful of this place," and he asked Barrett for his time.

The mill and mine buzzed with excitement. The men were the kind that would fight a buzz-saw, but this type of silent attack by an unseen foe got on their nerves. To add to their nervousness, on the second morning after the rock bombardment, the carrier had reached a point about a hundred feet above the rock where Bruce had perched that other day, when the cable snapped like a tow thread in a flame.

The lower half went writhing back in a whiplike crack, snatched the roof off a building, killed one man and crippled two others, flogged the side of the mill itself and tore off a section, wrecking enough machinery to mount to four figures.

The upper half snatched the loading chute off the upper dump or ore bin, threw it clear over the shaft-house, snapped every wire that crossed its path and left the hoist crippled. Bruce examined the ends of the cable at the break. Then he went to the shoulder of rock and searched for clues. He reported to Barrett.

"Eaten by acid poured from a bottle lashed across the end of a pole. Acid marks directly underneath the break and they show the traces of steel. Found the pole a hundred yards down the other slope, over beyond the rock, with the mark of acid that had been spilled near its small end. Squirrel is trying for finger-marks on the pole."

"Humph!" grunted Barrett. "He found finger-marks on the stone he brought home after the line was shorted. If he can match them now, we may have some evidence, but how the devil are we to know if they fit the Armstrong crowd? Kidnap them and take their impressions?"

Bruce made no reply because he could think of none. Not a man went to his work in the mine for three days. Only a third of the mill force worked at their usual tasks. They made good the damaged parts at both ends of the line and the three carpenters were busily replacing the broken woodwork. The carrier made two test trips down the new cable, the first with half a load, the second loaded to capacity.

The hoist man ran the skip up and down a few times and declared all was in shape for work once more. Barrett gave orders for all men to drop back to the regular jobs and the underground men got ready.

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That night Bruce wakened with the feeling that an earthquake had hit the ridge. He felt a heavy vibration and heard a dull roar. Then it came to him that this was no earthquake and he leaped from his bed. Barrett was outside with Squirrel and old Jack Bushnell, mine foreman. Bruce joined them.

"What was that?" asked Bruce of Barrett.

"More Armstrong stuff," answered the superintendent. "An explosion far up the cañon. I don't know what his object is, but he has some hellish idea. I'm going up there and find out."

"I'll go along," said Bruce, and the two men swung off up the trail with Bushnell calling after them.

"Look out those skunks don't shoot. I wouldn't put it past them to murder the pair of you."

"They would do that fast enough, if they stood a show to escape punishment," grunted Barrett, striding up the rising grade.

The men were pouring out of the bunkhouse below them and the air was humming with their talk. Sounds carry far in the stillness of the night and Bruce noted some stir down at the mill. Then, with a start of surprise, he realized that he did not hear the usual roar of the mountain stream that foamed and chuckled among the rocks at the bottom of the cañon. He stopped and spoke to Barrett.

"Listen! The creek has stopped running!"

Barrett checked himself with one foot just resting on its toes, ready for a forward swing. A second so, and he turned with an oath and started back at a run. Bruce followed him and they came down to the group of excited miners with a clatter of small stones that followed close upon their plunging run.

"Jack, get your men together and break out plenty of giant. Hurry as though all —— were after you. Those damnable hounds have shot the Gate full and we have got to break it open. Squirrel, phone to Bill Levering to look out for his men and move his most valuable stuff, that's loose, to higher ground. There'll be a head of water up there pretty soon that would take that mill out like a straw when it breaks loose," said Barrett. "Rush, men! Get a move on!"

BRUCE knew the Gate. He had seen it several times in his fishing trips. A great ledge of rock, towering forty feet above the level of the stream, cut down through the center by an arched opening not more than twenty feet in its widest part. At the top the arch was open about six feet, the rock curving away at each side. At one time the ledge or dike had closed the cañon like a dam, but had broken under pressure or been worn down by a leakage that carried eroding sand.

Just above the Gate, on either hand, were great, towering buttresses of soil, sand and loose rocks, remnants of the huge dam that had been formed by the waters above the foundation wall of rock. He knew that dynamite charges put in these buttresses would throw them forward, filling the space and damming the stream. Such a dam would hold till a large amount of water had accumulated, only to go out with a crash and rush at last, sending a flood down the cañon to wipe out the mill as one brushes a speck of lint off the sleeve.

Every man at the Splitrock mine and mill knew the danger. Every man leaped to his task. They swarmed up the trail, eagerly following Barrett. There was enough dynamite in the gang to lift the top off any peak in sight.

They found what they had expected, the Gate clogged two-thirds of its height with rocks and dirt. The noisy, full-flood stream was pouring its water into a rapidly forming lake. There was room here for a maximum width of two hundred yards and to reach the full height of the crude dam meant a backing up of dead water to a distance of a quarter-mile. Down at the mill the foundations were only four feet above the high-water mark of the last ten years.

Some of the men began to gather dry wood and brush for two fires to light the scene from either side. They piled their materials and touched a lighted match to each pile. The blaze shot up and the men stood out in clear relief. Something spatted on a boulder that lay between Jack Bushnell and Barrett and there came to them the whistle and shriek of glancing, tortured metal. There was no sound of shot.

Involuntarily the men gave ground, but Bushnell, swearing profusely, started toward the center of the dam, carrying a crowbar in one hand and a sledge in the other. He drove the bar part way down

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and loosened it with quick sideway strokes. Set it deeper and again hammered it about to widen the hole and render the bar loose. Came a sharp sound of metal on metal and he looked at his sledge. Along its side lay a streak where a bullet had glanced.

"To —— with you!" yelled Bushnell, facing the wooded slopes. "I can lick a dozen sneaks like you! Somebody fetch me a coupla sticks o' giant and don't be all night about it."

A man had set down a package of giant near Bruce and then had drifted behind a huge boulder, where he crouched on all fours. Bruce leaped to another man who carried a coil of fuse, caught it from him, picked up the giant and ran out to old Jack. The miner grasped two sticks of the dynamite and the coil of fuse.

Then he roared an order to Bruce to get under cover.

He coolly cut his fuse, split his cartridge, stuck a cap on the fuse and pushed it home in the powder. Then he lowered it in the hole his bar had made, and stamped dirt softly down around it with the handle of his sledge. Two bullets whined past him as he worked and he paid no attention to them. He scratched a match and set it to the fuse. There was a sound that was like a blow of a butcher's cleaver on a thick strip of meat and the old man slumped beside the spitting fuse.

With a quick turn Bruce swooped to thrust the package of giant in the hands of a man who ran to meet him, then turned back again to Jack. Two others beat him in the race and Bruce swung opposite the man who was lifting the injured man's shoulders. Quickly shuffling feet carried them after the scattering gang, in the shelter of the rocks.

Barrett yelled directions and led the way to where two big stones reared like a pair of fighting horses.

They were in the act of placing the old man on the ground when the lower part of the dam bulged, its top lifted, and a couple of carloads of dirt and rocks went out through the gate.

"A decent beginning," said Barrett. "We will have to let those fires die down and work in the dark or that —— sniper will get a lot more of us. Is Jack much hurt."

"Naw!" came the growl of Bushnell. "Just a busted leg. Can't some of the boys bushwhack that son of a gun that got me?"

"Only two guns in the lot and one of them a shotgun," said Barrett. "Of course some have revolvers, but most of them are pocket guns, no more use than popguns for hunting that chap. I'm going out to chuck those firebrands apart."

He rose to his feet and sprinted for the nearest fire. Two swift kicks that sent the brands flying and he came back, several bullets splitting the air with the ripping crack of high velocity projectiles. He dropped behind a protecting rock and panted. One of the miners charged the other fire and got pinked in the arm as he delivered his first kick. Instead of retreating, he cursed wholeheartedly, stooped and grasped a brand with his sound hand and sent it whirling off to a distance, then kicked the rest all abroad.

He came back to have his arm bound up and his lips dripped with bloodthirsty threats against the man who had shot him. The fires died down and winked out. Men began to crawl out on the dam and do their little stunts by feeling. They sank a line of four holes and prepared four charges, cutting the fuses the same length. When they had these all tamped home, four men scratched matches and lighted the fuses all at once.

At the first glimmer bullets began to screech and scream off the faces of rocks all about them.

"There are at least three men shooting now," said Bruce to the superintendent. "I saw a flash from the slope almost opposite and two others about fifty yards apart off to our right. They have a crossfire on us."

"Yes, and we can't do a thing but stick it out and blow this cussed dam out. If we stop to hunt them we will lose the mill. Anyhow, we aren't fixed for bushwhacking tonight."

Barrett moved over to make room behind the rocks for two men who had been out on the dam. They were barely hidden when the explosion came and another portion of the dam fell away to the lower level. Barrett rose to his feet as soon as the falling stones had ceased to patter. Bruce stood up with him.

"It's my turn now, men. Keep hidden while Kirby and I go out and see what we can do. Tom Skilling, you and Dick Powers prepare four more charges, and bring them out when I yell for them."

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SO THEY worked, by relays and in darkness, till just as the morning star was rising a bursting charge cleared the last bit of the long ditch they had been blasting along the top of that dam and the creek began to spill its waters out to the lower slopes.

"She'll cut fast and the deeper she digs the faster she'll cut," said Barrett. "Take a sneak, you fellows, for the mine and travel low. Don't give those murdering skunks a chance at you."

The men slipped away by ones and twos, till only Bruce and Barrett were left there. The two men who had been hit were taken out by the rest, Jack on a big miner's back, the other man walking, with two to steady him along the trail.

"Those fellows had silencers on their rifles," said Bruce. "If we show ourselves around here in daylight they will plug us."

"Sure they will," said Barrett. "Now that they have started in shooting they will keep it up, and they use high-powered guns. A man won't be safe under a mile after this. The directors will have to let me hire gunmen. They have kicked about it right along, but I don't see what else is left to us. We can't charge any man or set of men with the crimes on the evidence we now have. We will just have to lay for them and shoot them up while they're in the act."

"It will take five hundred men to defend the mine, mill and stream from that gang," said Bruce. "Look at that, now!" as a bullet *thucked* into the dirt within a foot of the leg he had unconsciously thrust out from behind the rock barricade. "That chap is using telescope sights or he never would have seen that leg in this dim light. If we are going to get out of here with whole skins, we had better be moving. It is growing light mighty fast."

They did it by swift running and erratic jumps from side to side, but the hum and rip of bullets followed them until they rounded a shoulder of the mountain two hundred yards down-stream.

"Barrett," said Bruce as they walked down the trail. "I stopped here to do a certain thing and I haven't made a fair start at my job yet. I'm going up the slope and find where that rock started from that went through the mill. Then I shall hunt for proof that it was started by men and with malice aforethought."

He left Barrett busy with the men, trying to quiet jumping nerves, and climbed down to the mill, then up the back track of the boulder.

"Well, Kirby, what did you find?" asked Barrett when Bruce returned shortly before noon. "Get any evidence that will land an Armstrong?"

"Nothing with the Armstrong name on it, but I found plenty of bark from a big lever on a rock just above the bed the boulder came out of, and I found the lever a quarter of a mile down the far slope. They dug down about four feet under the lower side of the rock and then got the lever rigged with block and tackle to a pine in back.

"The marks are plain and easily understood. I measured the hole the rock came from and it corresponds with the one it made back of the mill, seven feet five inches, indicating a tonnage that would have wrecked the mill completely if it had not been for that last leap going so high. Lucky thing that boulder jumped."

"You're right, Kirby, but what are we to do next? Can you originate a scheme by which we may fix the guilt upon the right party and prove it in court? So far, we can say that we believe the Armstrong family are the guilty ones, but we can't prove a single charge.

"Here we have been held up by a short circuit, bombarded by a boulder, lost a good cable and had the stream dammed, to say nothing of one man dead and four wounded. All of that since you came up here. In the six months immediately preceding your advent we were subjected to a lot of costly annoyances, but no one was killed or seriously injured. They are more desperate and bold. How can we stop them?"

"I don't know," acknowledged Bruce. "I'm stuck."

"Well then, tell me how I am going to keep the gang at work. They have served notice on me that the company must stop these outrages or lose its men. They say that at the next disaster that endangers the life of a single worker, they will all quit in a body."

Bruce was silent. It was impossible for him to think of any way in which a state of nerves could be treated successfully. He did not blame the men. Neither could he think of any method by which Armstrong and his sons could be quieted, unless they were bought off.

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"Has any one ever tried to buy the Armstrongs' good will?" he asked.

"Yes," said Barrett. "I sent a man around to see him, to find out what he wanted exactly, and the old pirate said he wanted his claim and nothing else. He took it as an admission of fraud and weakness. He has been three times as bad since. It was a mistake."

Bruce left the office and went up to the ridge to think. He sat on a rock and looked off down the cañon while he tried to plan some great coup by which he should win over the Armstrongs. Something went past his head and tweaked at his cap, throwing it back of him. At the same time he heard that ripping crack that he had learned to associate with high-powered rifles. He started to rise, got half-way up, was seized with a lightning-like inspiration and slumped over on his side, all asprawl on the ground beside his rock.

He lay without motion, his face toward the next ridge, and his eyes watching through half-shut lids. He saw a head lifted just enough to bring the eyes above the ridge. It paused there for a moment and then drew down again. Still Bruce did not move, though he lay in a cramped position. Presently he caught a glimpse of that head again, fifty yards up the ridge, peering back at him. He held his posture long after it had disappeared completely.

It was well on toward night when Bruce came back to the camp by the mine shaft. He found Barrett in the office and took his cap off to shove it under the superintendent's nose. There were two neat holes to mark where that bullet had come in and gone out.

"Ah-hah! Came —— near getting you, eh? Where and when?" asked Barrett.

A face showed at the office window for an instant and two sharp eyes looked at the cap, but neither man inside heard or saw the watcher. Bruce was grinning, but there was a certain amount of pale shakiness about his grin that robbed it of its usual humor.

"Right up on the ridge above here, just after I left you. Took my cap off for me very neatly. I had it cocked on the back of my head and he drilled the base of the visor. I'll put it on in the same position and let you see how close it came to my skull."

Barrett stood up and ran a lead-pencil through the holes. So near to the scalp did it rest that there was scant room for another pencil beneath the first. Barrett shook his head gravely.

"Kirby, that was a —— close squeak for you. Only about half an inch lower and your scalp would have been plowed and the bone nicked. That gang are out to do murder and nothing less will satisfy them."

A SLIGHT sound at the window drew their attention and the face of a miner looked in at them. Barrett jumped to the door.

"Knowles," he snapped. "What are you doing here? Why are you at my window like that?"

"Jack sent me after a couple of new drills. I didn't mean to peek and listen, Boss, but I saw him showin' his cap as I was passin' and I just stopped to see what fer."

"Well, get back to your work," said Barrett, frowning. "Keep your mouth shut while you're working, too."

"Sure, Boss," said the man, dropping the long drills he held. "Just give me my time, please. I'll keep my mouth shut somewhere else than around here. I've got enough."

Barrett looked worried when he turned to Bruce after Knowles had gone. He dropped in his chair and sighed.

"All gone to smash," he said. "There won't be a man on the place, outside of the wounded, in two hours from now. Knowles will tell all the rest about your being shot at and how near you came to being killed. With their ultimatum in my hands now, they will not give me a day of grace. Kirby, we have got to shoot this out."

"Better send out for some guns then," said Bruce. "That old rifle that is here isn't worth a picayune at above three hundred yards. The shotgun with buckshot might kill at forty. These murderers use silencers and telescope sights. I am going to send down an order for the best rifle in Los Angeles, with a telescope on it."

Barrett was a true prophet. The men began streaming down the trail to the mill and from the mill toward the railroad, twenty-six miles below, as soon as they had eaten supper. Barrett advised them to stay till morning and sleep in their bunks, but they refused.

"Like as not we'd wake up in the middle

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of the night with every buildin' blazin' and them murderin' skunks snipin' at us by the firelight," said one. "Not me! I'm goin' while the goin's good."

By dark there were only Barrett, Bruce and the cook left above. Down at the mill there was the foreman, the timekeeper, and two more.

Bruce and Barrett talked till late that night, and Bruce decided that he would sleep in the bunk-house, with only the cook as company. Barrett had the old-style Winchester, with its short, heavy cartridges, and Bruce kept the shotgun and some buckshot shells.

"Not that I expect an attack tonight," he said. "It may be wise to have both places guarded, though, and you can get a view of the shaft-house from your windows."

"I shall leave the arc light burning above the motor shack," said Barrett. "It may help some."

It was after midnight when Bruce wakened. He had been sleeping very soundly, in spite of anxiety about the plant. He had lain awake for an hour after retiring, but when he had gone to sleep at last, had slept heavily. Now he wondered what had wakened him. He raised his head a little to listen. A sound came to him, the sound of wire dragged slowly, softly, around a corner of the bunk-house. He swung his legs over the side of the bunk and picked up his trousers.

When Bruce had donned some clothing and encased his feet in his shoes, he picked up his jersey, cut the sleeves off close to the shoulders with his knife, and pulled them on over his shoes. He rose to his feet and found that he could, by using a little care, walk in absolute silence. He crept to the window, carrying the shotgun. He saw no person, but the shine of the arc light sifting through the trees, showed him lines in front of that window that he had not seen there before. He knew them at once.

"Crosswires and vertical wires, laced and twisted. That can only mean one thing," he thought.

He went to the door and softly drew it open. The space was just a big network of wires. He crept back to the bunk where the old cook lay snoring and shook him awake, keeping a hand over his mouth to squelch any sound. He whispered to the old man, telling him what he had found and the old fellow nodded vigorously. Bruce left him and sneaked back to the door. He got the body of his jersey and slipped it on. It fitted snugly and he smoothed its skirt down close. He turned to meet the cook, stealing quietly up to him.

"You keep the gun and guard this place. Keep away from the wires and don't make a sound," Bruce said to him, and again the man nodded.

Bruce turned to the door and lay down flat on his face. He had seen that a vertical wire in the center had lifted the bottom wire that encircled the house, leaving a little more space in the exact center than at the sides. Reaching his arms beneath the wire, he hooked his fingers over the top step and pulled, keeping his elbows flat on the floor. His head went under the wire.

Every nerve was tingling and the cold sweat stood out all over his body, when Bruce finally slid down the steps and got his hands on the cold ground. He got to his feet and crept around the corner, keeping close watch lest he step on a wire or brush against one. He wanted to go straight to Barrett's cottage and warn him, but did not dare lest the miscreants hear. They must have no opportunity to escape or fight, if it were possible to prevent it.

He stole along the line of trees, working his way well out past the group of buildings. He meant to approach the men, whom he could now hear tinkering around the shaft-house, from a quarter from which they would never suspect danger.

It was slow work and Bruce was in a fever of anxiety lest it be too slow. He came out at last where he could work down in the shadow of the buildings and come upon the intruders from the opposite direction from the bunk-house. He peered around a corner and listened. Four men were standing in a knot by the motor shack. He heard low voices mumbling, but caught no words. Then two left the others and went out to the stage from which they might climb into the carrier.

One of the others went inside the motor shack and Bruce heard the hum of the motor. The carrier moved off down the cable, slowly and hesitatingly, plainly managed by unaccustomed hands. The last man picked up a package from the ground and entered the shaft-house. Bruce stole swiftly out and made for the motor shack.

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HE REACHED the door of the shack and peeped in. The dark form of a man showed against the glass front, looking down at the carrier as it slid lower and lower. His hand was on the handle of the controller. Bruce stepped inside and the man looked back.

"Hurry up, Jack," he said impatiently. "Get the shot ready."

A three-pound stone, hurled by a strong arm at a distance of ten feet is a hard thing for a face to stop. The man at the controller let go its handle and slumped into an inert heap. Bruce took his place.

The carrier had passed the rock where stood the man who dropped acid on the cable a few days ago. It was leaving the mountainside and swinging farther out. Now it was forty feet from the nearest ground. Fifty, sixty, and Bruce shut off the current. He stooped and ran his hands over the heap of flesh and bone at his feet. He rose again with a heavy revolver in his hand.

The sound of feet came from the entrance and he looked up to see the man who had gone into the shaft-house. The gun in the hand of Bruce did not appear till the other was well inside the shack. He was not slow in putting his hands up.

In a few minutes Bruce came out of the shack with a second gun in his pocket and began to search for something. He found it soon, a pole about ten feet long. He took it inside, paying no attention to sundry movements in the steel carrier far below. He found wire in coils hanging on the walls and pliers in the little tool-chest. He came outside again presently, and picked up a length of wire he had thrust out through the open window.

He climbed the stage to where he could reach the cable and threw this over, lifted it and threw it over a second time. Then he pulled hard and the wrap drew tight and he twisted the wires. He came back to the shack and wrapped another wire about an insulator he had stuck on the end of the pole, leaving a loose end of wire that stuck up several feet. With the pole he was able to lift this wire till it touched the looping cable that draws the carrier back to the mine after it has slid down to the mill.

He seemed pleased at the commotion that began in the carrier and touched the wire to the cable again. Yells came floating up to him and Bruce chuckled.

"If they raise such a howl over two hundred and twenty volts, I wonder what they would say to the power current," he muttered.

One last shot from the wire he gave the two down below, then he began a search for the insulated cutters he knew that Squirrel had somewhere about the shack. He found them and went up the line to locate the weighted wire that connected the power line with the network about the cottage and bunk-house.

"I've got our friends, the Armstrongs," he told Barrett as that gentleman came out to his steps. "Come take a peep at them."

He led the way to the motor shack and showed him Jack, gagged and tied, back to back, with his unconscious brother Bill. He showed Barrett how a heavy wire ring encircled both necks and was twisted tight enough to just touch the skin and be impossible of removal without cutting. Then he led him outside and had him look down to the carrier where old Jim and his son Harvey were enjoying the cool morning air. He even touched the cable with the wire once.

"I coupled on to the lighting current for the incandescents," he explained. "It won't hurt them any and it may keep them from catching cold. You see the connection is perfect. Steel cable and trolley, steel cable and carrier. Steel to steel both ways 'round."

When daylight had fully come and the men from the mill had been called up to the mine by telephone, Bruce reeled in his catch and the old cook and Barrett stood guard with their guns while the rest made the Armstrongs fast. They found enough dynamite in the carrier to have blown the mill into the creek. Another bunch was tucked into the hoisting machinery at the shaft.

"Well, Barrett," said Bruce, watching the four ride down to the cañon bottom in irons, with the sheriff in charge, that afternoon, "I didn't have any idea of how I was going to do it, but I pacified the Armstrongs thoroughly, I believe."

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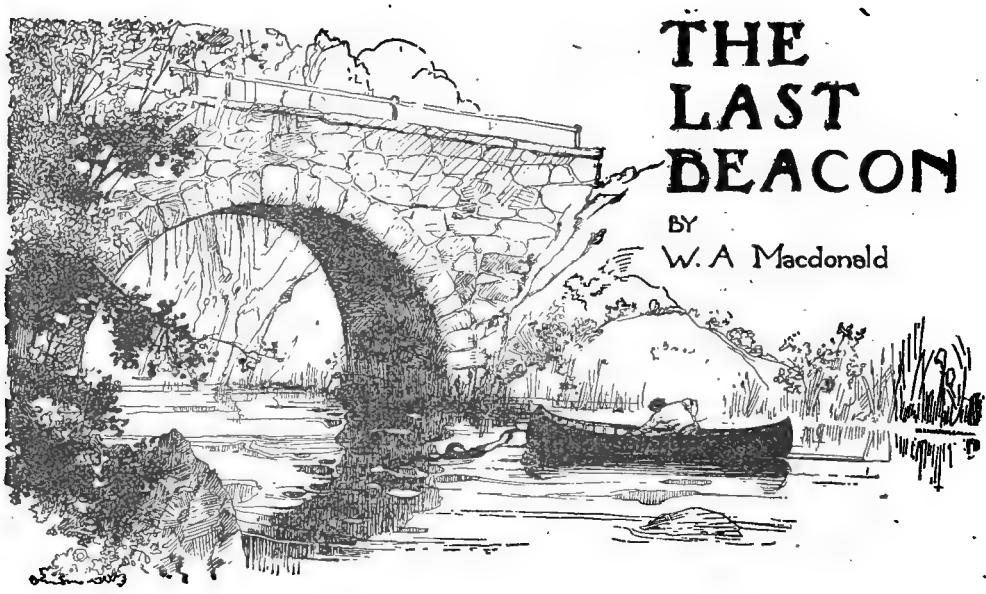

THE LAST BEACON

BY

W. A Macdonald

Author of "The Water Cover," "The Little War," etc.

TAYLOR was sitting with his back to the wall smoking a short-stemmed brier, a part of the ring established about the stove of the country general store, when a messenger burst in, red-faced with the crisp evening air and with the importance of the word he bore.

"There's another bonfire in the hills," he shouted. "On Camelback this time. This makes the fourth."

In the sudden hush that fell upon the room a rat scampered scratchingly through the wall and up over the plastered ceiling. Then—from their magnetized gaze at the excited, scared face of the young farmer-messenger, eye after eye turned to Taylor.

He sat beneath a battered, bracketed kerosene lamp, somewhat in the shadow that it made for its own yellow flicker. Yet the light was enough to bring out the lines and to accentuate the shadows of his face, out of which stood the straight nose, the broad forehead and the well-defined jaw that held the pipe motionless.

"It's the fourth time," repeated an elderly man with chin-whiskers, facing Taylor from the outer edge of the circle. His next neighbor, middle-aged, glanced anxiously over his shoulders toward the door, then turned his gaze back and added his attention to the others.

"How long after his bonfire does he kill?" asked Taylor quietly.

The tension broke with the sound of his voice.

"Takes hours to get down from Camelback after building that fire," answered the messenger. A dozen men, thus having their attention called to something they knew perfectly well, sighed audible if anxious relief.

"Last time he killed three days after the fire," said the elderly man.

The storekeeper, a little man with a wagging chin-whisker, leaned over the counter, resting his weight on both forearms, and spoke sharply.

"First two times it was next day," he related in a high nasal voice. "He sent that there letter to the deacon first—" he indicated the elderly man—"sayin' he was goin' to kill somebody every so often down here because he was sent to jail for stealin' guns from Judd Littlefield's store. Couldn't get the guns back neither—nor all the ca'tridges he stole. He was always crazy, anyhow, that Driscoll was. Then he got out o' jail and sent that letter to the deacon, an' right after that he killed Ned Willis, shot him down while Ned was plowing his field. He said in his letter he was goin' to build a big bonfire in the hills so we could see it before he killed somebody; an' sure enough, he built a fire before he killed John White an' one before he came down and killed Fred Jenkins."

"Who's next?" asked a pale young man

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near Taylor in a voice that shook. He worked an outlying farm.

The door opened gustily, and a big man bulked in. He called out in a hoarse voice—

"Jimmy Driscoll's burnin' another warning."

Then he came straight over to Taylor who was smoking quietly.

"I've done all I can," the big man urged. "It's the first time any man ever fooled me since I been chief of police. But I ain't the only one—the deputy sheriff of this district tried it, and there's nothing the matter with Doyle when he goes after a man. The sheriff himself has done all he knows. The boys here have hunted through the woods for days, but it didn't do no good. It only got Jenkins killed. Now, Mr. Taylor, it's up to you. You come to us highly recommended. I don't know what you can do that ain't been done, but we want you to try."

He sat down on a soap box and mopped his face as his bulk felt the heat of the stove.

"Driscoll is a good shot, I suppose," said Taylor.

The answer was a varied chorus of assent.

"He's the best in these parts," concluded the deacon soberly. "He never did much but hunt and fish and trap. This is all woods and hills country, Mr. Taylor, as you could see when you came up here in the train; and Driscoll knows his way about better than any of us. The boys have seldom seen even his camps. We only see his fires and his work. He is very keen and cunning. I think he is more vicious than just crazy."

"Glad to furnish you free with any firearms I've got, Mr. Taylor," offered a voice from the corner.

"It's Judd Littlefield," the deacon informed Taylor.

Taylor blew a cloud of smoke.

"I brought some with me, Mr. Littlefield."

He lifted his hand as if toward his pipe. In the palm lay the black and evil brevity of a heavy automatic. None had seen the motion that produced it; a little gasp ran around the circle. He held the weapon out to Littlefield.

"I never saw one just like that," said the man after an examination.

Taylor rose, to the relief of the men eager to see the sign in the hills. He was a little above medium height. In the simple motion of getting to his feet something bespoke the muscular efficiency of a lean tiger. But the pleasant face of the man smiled.

"Let's have a look at the bonfire," he suggested, and led the way to the door.

The fire was still burning, although dying down. It was far away on a hill visible only in the gap between two others. Men were already gathered there, watching, when they came to the point of observation in the country road; and they all stood silently staring at the portent that to one of them might mean death.

"Well, Mr. Taylor," said the deacon after a long interval.

But Taylor had gone. One of the men thought he had seen a shadow merging with the darkness of the road, but he was not sure.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the man who had first brought the message of the fire.

"Hope he ain't got cold feet," ejaculated the grocer who had left his store unattended to come with the party.

"I guess you don't know Taylor's reputation," announced the big chief gruffly.

FAR UP in the hills a cunning mind behind a wicked face considered from a safe distance the dying embers of the fire it had kindled to warn the valley. Miles away and lower down in the hills a shadowy figure that with an occasional flashlight illuminated a wrist-compass, moved swiftly upward, avoiding impassable places by means of the memorized details of an intimate and carefully studied map which had been supplemented by local information.

And as the cunning mind of the fire-builder laughed to itself at the days or possible weeks the valley would dwell in fear before he risked his stroke, the keen mind of the swiftly passaging man in the lower shadows was confirming its belief that Driscoll would not attempt his kill this time until the effect of the warning which it was his brag to give had lost a little of its terror and men went abroad more freely again, and with fewer precautions; for there were several marksmen in the village to whom Driscoll did not care to be a target.

But daylight, looking down upon the

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wooded hills, revealed nothing of either Taylor or the man-killer. Only a squirrel, chattering noisily, ran angrily from the bough of a tree that concealed an intruder whose hands were busy with a pair of powerful binoculars, and from whose shoulder hung a high-powered rifle. The tree commanded the woods and the open ground for miles. The binoculars picked up even the most vagrant and quickly suppressed wisps of smoke above the forest that sloped away to the valley opposite the village. The route indicated that the killing was not to be today.

Through an opening in the trees the glasses came upon the shine of water. A mile or two away this emerged briefly into the open—a river. As it descended it widened, and Taylor glimpsed it again, winding more broadly through lower land before it reentered the forest. His mind put together the probabilities of psychology, landscape and the known habits of the man Driscoll, and then began to eliminate one after another.

Thus it happened that Driscoll was headed toward the river, and Taylor was headed for the river.

The killer emerged cautiously from the bushes at the bank and got his bearings. His glance was keen and comprehensive. In a minute he retired, proceeded softly a few yards, then emerged again, put his hand into the reeds and, stretching his arm, encountered the bow of a canoe. He dragged it nearer, put his rifle aboard, felt beneath a pile of brush till he found a paddle, and got into the craft.

It was an easy way to travel. Experience and study had taught him that both banks were inaccessible for miles except where he had embarked. The open places through which the river occasionally swept were of extensive swamp across which a dull canoe, slipping down swiftly and close to the rank grasses high at the bank, could go unobserved. Not until the river reached a bridge did it become dangerous—a bridge that carried an unfrequented country road across the river which here ran still and deep a dozen feet below.

An hour passed. Driscoll grew cautious. His paddle had almost caught up with his thoughts. He knew that the bridge, hidden by a curve of the river, was just ahead.

With a call on new muscles he checked his light craft with the broad blade. Close to the shore to which he swept himself he considered the situation. If the coast was clear he chose to whisk beneath the bridge. Conditions favored success in this, for the stream crooked suddenly in sight of the bridge here, shot beneath, and then swerved as sharply out of observation. The whole passage of the dangerous open was a matter of a few minutes.

He listened intently.

No farmer's wagon, squeaking along the road, broke the quiet; no boy whistled; there was no heavy trudge of footsteps; only the quiet ripple of water murmured past the canoe. Carefully he let the craft down the stream until he could see the bridge. It spanned the stream, a structure of stone with handrails and a massive arch, the tribute of some rustic builder to his hope for the future of his community. Above the rail no one moved. He plunged the paddle deep; the canoe swept forward.

It had almost reached the bridge; then fiercely Driscoll's blade checked his craft in a swirl of water. For a shadow flitted in the mirror and was gone.

There was no sound except the faint talk of the river in the afternoon quiet. The current eddied past the canoe which cannily nudged inside two convenient stones that checked it from drifting. Driscoll's holster emptied a revolver into his hand. He twisted sidewise to command both edges of the stone flooring above him, and sat alertly in the dimness. He held the advantage of looking out upon the light.

But perhaps the man above had not seen. Driscoll was very still. He knew he could not be ambushed from the banks—the brush grew too thickly. Over his head stood Taylor, lean and bronzed and thoughtful, but with observant eyes. In the water his shadow no longer betrayed him.

He scanned the heavy undergrowth at the banks. The broad forehead pushed into tigerish wrinkles between the eyes. The eyes glittered, the whole face contracted into a mask, fierce, uncompromising, the semblance of war. A pocket of his coat gave up a length of rope.

He knotted one end swiftly to the rail. The other he looped about one putteed ankle. As he straightened up he brought with him a large stone from the roadway. For a moment he balanced it in one hand, then hove it high and wide across the other side of the bridge.

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As it fell Taylor went over his own side with incredible swiftness. His feet, clinging to the rough stone, kept him straight; one slender, steel-like hand clutching ahead half held his weight for a second. Suddenly he dropped past the keystone of the arch. Almost at the same time on the other side of the bridge the stone struck the water. The splash whirled Driscoll sharply toward it. Behind him, head downward, hung Taylor, by one ankle.

FOR a flash of time only he hung there, but it sufficed. The deadly spit of the automatic flamed livid in the shadows. The suspended figure made a pendulum of itself, and the flame now stabbing upward, seared the rope between foot and bridge-rail. Taylor, falling straight, struck the water headforemost.

A dozen feet from where he submerged he came to the surface, just above a cursing and snarling man with a broken shoulder who despite the impact of the bullet had managed to stay in the canoe, though his revolver, dropping from his nerveless hand, lay at the bottom of the stream.

"Shove out," ordered Taylor, his voice echoing strangely beneath the bridge.

Laboriously with his good hand Driscoll complied, watching the swimmer warily. Slowly the craft drifted into the current and floated into the daylight. Driscoll laid down his paddle awkwardly and bent his full gaze upon the head that followed him. He lowered a face of rage and hate toward the rifle that lay, muzzle pointed astern, in the bottom of the canoe. He might make a hit through the shell of the boat.

The swimmer rolled to one side, lifting an arm from the water.

"Don't do that, Driscoll," he whipped out. But what Driscoll saw, fascinated, was the ugly automatic that nosed out of the fist just above the river.

A hundred yards below they found a landing. Whence by devious paths they labored back to the road not far from the bridge. The prisoner marched ahead, and behind him the dust of the road curled up and coated the dripping puttees of his captor.

Then some strange freak of the darkness that came down made their figures one—strange, distorted, misshapen, enlarged. This figure paused, then moved on steadily, rapidly.

Out of the night it loomed hours later at the door of the country general store. The circle of men rose in the tobacco smoke with a rush and a cry or two, quickly suppressed.

Taylor laid his burden down gently on the long counter amid the dust of flour and the chaff of oatmeal. He straightened up face to face with the big chief of police.

"Get a doctor, Chief," he said quickly.

Then the hard lines smoothed out into a smile as he looked about the group of faces tense and curious in the light of the smoky lamps. Through the silence cut the high, nasal voice of the little grocer with the wagging chin-whisker.

"Good Lord," he exclaimed. "Ain't ye even out o' breath?"

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THE GLEANING

By S. B. H. Hurst

Author of "Flotsam," The Waters Under the Earth," etc.

"And he said: 'Cast it not into the pit amongst the dung, for haply ye may find some little of value in it, if ye will but seek hard in the right manner.'"

A SILENCE so deep that the ear grew restless for sound, just as a muscle craves action after enforced idleness. The noise of a fallen flake of snow would have startled like the report of a gun, but the whisper of a human voice, however gruff, would have been as heavenly music—provided the voice was not Hume's own. For several times he had caught himself talking to himself—when he had looked over his shoulder apprehensively, fearing the grinning specter of madness.

Time had ceased for him. In an eternal Now, he only existed to fight against the decreasing weight of his scanty provisions, with a devil in his stomach that continuously twitched his unwilling hand to crowd food to his palsied mouth. And when he could not keep his eyes down any longer, and he looked up, he saw the silent stars watching him with contempt.

But he could not argue with them, for to do that meant the sound of his own voice. So he tried to make them understand by thinking the words he wanted to tell them—thinking hard, with his eyes closed, as he had once seen a "thought transference" performer do on the stage.

Yes, lying there under the Arctic stars, George Hume, M.D., tried to send "thought waves" to those stars, telling them that if their lives were as short as his, they, too, would cling to life with desperation. He did this because he felt the sting of their contempt, and he was afraid of the sound of his own voice!

And it would be harder for him to die than for most men. He was so much stronger, had so much more vitality. Why, he was actually comfortably warm in his sleeping-bag in the snow, even when he put out his head and bare hands to take food.

With a compound fracture of the right leg, he had been lucky to crawl into the bag, three days previously, before he fainted. And since he had nothing with which to set the leg, nor nerve enough to try to, and no crutch—which however, would have been of little use in the snow—and less than one full meal left—death seemed certain.

But he was in that curious mood which is caused by a disintegrating ego—ashamed of a clinging to life that implied a fear of death, he yet commiserated himself upon the hardness of his dying as compared to that of other men; while his enormous vitality and semi-delirium prevented his realizing the nearness of his end.

He lay on a wide plain of snow. About three miles away was a dark line that apparently indicated trees. That was all, except through the awful stillness of the night the flicker of the stars and the Northern Lights. He was neither a hunter, a trapper nor a prospector. An unlucky fall upon the curiously brittle bones often found

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in large-muscled men, had ended the straining forced march he was making toward an Indian village he had been told about; and he had lain in his bag ever since.

Doubtful of the efficacy of thought transference, in a moment of forgetfulness, he cried to the largest star he could see:

"And you're not bothered all your life by a woman, either. You don't fall in love—when no man with blood in his veins can help doing that."

Then he shuddered, and burrowed into his bag like a frightened rabbit.

The pain of the broken leg had ceased to be anything more than a dull ache—a sort of numb, tired feeling—and during an almost lucid interval he began to try to calculate his distance from the Indian village; but he found that his memory of the distance he had made before his accident was as vague as his knowledge of the distance yet to travel. And direction, too, was most uncertain.

Thereupon he became very angry with himself for having idled away so much time in the bag. Surely he could crawl. Crawling would be better than lying there. So he began to struggle out of his bag, giving his wounded leg an awful wrench as he did so. But he set his teeth hard, and managed to keep from fainting.

Then he made a sledge of his bag, and put his belongings and tiny amount of food inside it—beginning his terrible traverse by pulling the sleeping-bag after him, as he crawled painfully on his hands and one knee.

His weight pawed the snow into little hills, and the bag raised a drift ahead of it, which he had to clear away every few yards. The trail was fluffy, and packed squashily. Now and then he cried like a child from the poignant hopelessness of his task; after which he would curse at himself for being so weak, and begin a never-finished tirade against the stars for watching him. As he explained to them: a gentleman would turn his head away rather than cause further suffering to a man by watching his shame.

"You're as bad as a dirty crowd that jeers at a poor devil before going to jail in the police wagon," he told the stars.

Then he dropped his head forward, and frantically strove to cover distance.

He was going parallel to what he took for a line of trees, having some curious notion about using them as a guide, and he was growing very tired and sleepy, so that he took to munching food to keep himself awake, which he gravely told himself would make the bag lighter and easier to pull.

Then, suddenly, a breath of warm air smote on his neck like a blow from the fist of an unseen, malignant spirit. The unexpectedness of the thing sent his courage glimmering. Then came the reaction of anger, while the vague co-ordination of his mental processes connected the hot breath with a star—yes, a shooting star, which had only just missed falling on him. And since the only man Hume was afraid to fight was himself, he saw nothing incongruous in grappling with a meteor.

Thus, ready for battle, he turned with as rapid a switch as his condition would permit, and—gazed with astonishment into the face of a wolf, a few inches from his own, the animal tensed stiffly on its four legs.

He had little time to wonder at the brute's being so far north at that season, or speculate on the cause of its ostracization from the pack. Its dribbling fangs reeked the hunger that was sending it to the attack—it had, probably, at first taken Hume for a dead man—and the glare in its eyes drowned any shadow of fear.

But as it struck—darting in for the throat—Hume raised himself so that his arms were free, and with a supreme effort clutched the beast about its neck, his fingers feeling for the grip that would shut off its wind. Then he managed to fling the entire weight of his body upon the animal, in such a way that it was held beneath him in the soft snow.

His first thought, as the pumping blood of the struggle cleared the haze from his brain, was one of admiration at his own adroitness in so swiftly removing his mittens; his next was one of joy in the recognition of the strength of his hands and arms, and the next told him that the wolf was weak and thin, and an easy antagonist.

Stripped, Hume weighed over two hundred pounds; with the extra weight and breadth of his furs he imprisoned the wolf so that it had no chance to wriggle away. Besides, thrill of the fight went a long way to make up for his loss of strength.

His laughed and shouted glee was flung out on the still atmosphere with the heave of his laboring lungs, mingling oddly with the stifled, puppy-like cries of the near-strangled wolf.

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Once in his excitement he nearly lost control of the animal by raising it in his powerful hands by the neck-grip he had never loosened, and trying to stand upright like a wrestler to dash his antagonist to the ground. His broken leg forced a scream from him when he put a thoughtless foot upon the snow, and he fell—the wolf slipping somewhat to one side.

Had this occurred earlier, before the man's paralyzing grip had drained the brute's vitality, the animal would at least have escaped. As it was, although close to fainting from the sudden spasm of pain, the man retained his hold, and after a struggle managed again to roll himself across the body of the wolf, resting his weight upon it with a grunt of satisfaction, and crushing some of its ribs with a sound like that of sticks being broken under a sack to keep them from the rain.

AND that ended it, although the animal made a few weak efforts to get its head free. A sort of shiver, and the body relaxed; the man sinking on the snow, breathing heavily, his hands full of hair. He rested a few minutes, then began hastily to wipe his hands before putting them into his mitts. The sleeping-bag was some yards away across the flattened snow of the battle-ground, and Hume dragged himself toward it, feeling he had earned the meal he felt in such need of.

But what he wanted most was a drink. He had matches, but no wood, and that line of trees was far away for one in his condition. He cursed himself for not having edged in toward the trees, while he fumbled in the bag for food. Well, he would do it now; for drink he must have, and to get drink he must melt snow. He had enough self-control to avoid eating it unmelted.

Surely, he had not eaten all the grub? He felt sure there must be more. But, no, except for two bits of broken hard tack there was nothing but the can of tea. And the worst of it was he had no pleasant memory of a full meal, only bits of food now and then. But perhaps he had dropped some food on the snow. Should he go back on his trail, and look?

He shuddered at the thought of again double tracking that hard-won distance—at the memory of every pain-filled yard. No, a thousand times no. Better to starve than to go back. And besides, after all, he might not have dropped any food. It was, indeed, unlikely; because he had been so anxious to get it into his mouth as soon as his hand had closed upon it in the bag.

No, he would not go back. He would try for wood to make a fire. There might be other wolves. It was not likely, but there had been one, so why not more? And if there were any 'round about, the dead one would bring them. He must have fire.

He began to crawl again, this time directly toward the dark line which he thought indicated trees. He was new to Arctic life, and although he had absorbed much of its lore during his short experience of its rigors he was not aware that the numbness of his broken leg spelt frost-bite. He struggled on, weaving fancies about the glow of the fire he was so soon to enjoy.

He would lie there, and rest. Melt snow, and drink. How he did want to rest, and drink! But he grew sleepy again, and had to fight to keep awake. Yet the trees came no nearer. There was the same dark line against the low sky, but no trees. And then a horrible thought chilled his soul—perhaps the dark line did not mean trees. His sight was not of the best. But, trees or not, he must push on. And then hunger began to crowd away his dreams of drink.

It seemed like hours afterward. He was still pushing on—stopping every few yards to clear the snow from in front of his sleeping-bag. He was now traveling on his reserve strength—drawing from that well of energy few men know they possess—struggling toward the goal of a glowing fire.

But why did he want a fire? Oh, yes, he remembered—he had to warm the snow until it melted. But that terrible burning about his mouth—that said he had not waited to melt the snow. What a fool he had been, not to wait. The line of trees was not very far.

Oh, yes—and he wanted a fire to keep the wolves away. Wolves, what wolves? He had killed all the wolves long ago—strangled them all to death, away back there on the snow. So, what did he want with a fire? To keep warm. To keep warm—why, he was warm enough. At least, he was not cold.

His mind no longer seemed to be a part of him. It had, as it were, become a detached, judicial personality, which criticized him rather unkindly, and was inclined to make cutting remarks about his mistakes. That

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wolf, now. There had been only one wolf. Why had he left it behind on the trail? Served him right. He could have lived on that wolf for a week. He had left a whole week's fresh meat back there on the snow. After taking all that trouble to kill it, too. —— fool. Serve him right if he did suffer from hunger.

But, it was growing darker, and there was an eery whisper moving very slowly over the face of the snow. What was it? It was as if the face of the great white plain were trying to tell him something in a curiously weak voice. Little *tip-tip* sorts of noises just stirred the surface of the snow in a crisp, definite manner. But what was the use of it? The snow plain was just wasting its time. It wasn't a bit of use its trying to tell him anything—he couldn't understand its language.

Then his brain—watching him from a place just overhead and behind him—told him he was a fool. It was not the first time his brain had told him that. He almost believed it, anyway. But why was his brain calling him a fool? Oh, yes, because he did not understand what the snow was whispering to him, was trying to tell him.

What was it, then, Mr. Brain? If you're so darned clever, Mr. Brain, why don't you tell poor Hume what the snow means? Eh, you won't? Well, what are you there for, anyway? Perhaps you don't know yourself. Oh, you do, do you? Perhaps —but how do I know you know? So, that's it—the snow is saying that wind is coming, lots of wind. Going to blow, eh? And I'd better get into the bag and cover up. But, what about—about where I am trying to get to? Haven't moved an inch for an hour? Is that true? My God! And why is it so dark?

He struggled feebly, although he believed himself to be making tremendous efforts. Yet he couldn't move to creep into the bag. Strangely enough, while he didn't appreciate his inability to move, he became suddenly aware that the dark line did not indicate trees, but sea ice. So, he had been going somewhere in the right direction. The Indian village was near the sea.

His ineffectual attempts to send his will with sufficient power along his nerves to move his muscles puzzled him, weak as he was. Then he noticed vaguely that a small mound of snow obstructed his progress, moving like the mountain of a dream in his swimming sight. It was a curious thing, that mountain. Why did he have to drag his sleeping-bag over it before he could crawl inside and get warm?

There was some reason, he felt sure. The path was blocked by it. Yes, oh, yes—like a street blocked by the raised hand of a traffic policeman. And—there was actually the hand. . . Hand, hand . . . A hand blocking the traffic. . . .

The sight of that bare, frozen hand acted like an electric shock. It protruded from the mound of snow that blocked his way with ghastly meaning. A shriek struggled through his lips. And then—as a babe to a bright object, as an idiot to anything that shines, as life to the glitter of the sun—he made a spasmodic grasp for something that gleamed dully near the finger-tips of the hand—something that, falling from the dying grip, had caught between two stiffening fingers and held—and clutched it.

And then the horror of it all gave him a fearful lease of momentary life, and he staggered and fell, staggered and fell again—making hideous progress—toward where he wanted to go; clutching the dully gleaming bit of metal he had filched from the dead hand, and screaming and careering like a wounded bird, leaving his sleeping-bag with the mound that covered the dead.

He did not travel very far in this terrible manner—trying to run with a broken leg along a rottenly soft trail. He could not have gone far, even if he had been properly nourished; and he had entirely lost self-consciousness. But what distance he made —reacting blindly, automatically to his gruesome find—was enough to bring him, a fearsome apparition, within the range of vision of two Indians, running a three-dog sledge.

NOW, NINETY-NINE out of any hundred men but those of the highest type would have fled in terror from the picture Hume made in that half-light. He looked worse than a madman, worse than a spirit, perhaps as awful as a newly risen corpse might look. And the gait of him was like nothing else in the world. Add to this horrible appearance the weird cries he sent shrilling along the rising wind, and you have something from which any man might turn and flee, and not feel ashamed of so doing.

But the Indians acted queerly. One,

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indeed, did halt in a hesitating way, but the other, the leader, spoke sharply to him, and they mushed their team in Hume's direction, having some trouble with the dogs, for even the dogs were scared.

But Hume never saw them. A moment after they started in his direction, his screaming ceased—to the vast relief of all concerned—and after a few more strange floppings and fallings, he fell and lay still.

About this point one might do much philosophizing without much profit. Perhaps there was nothing strange about Hume's bumping into the dead man in the snow—he was on the same trail, for one thing, and, for another, any mark or hillock or difference on that barren white plain was bound to attract him subconsciously.

And the dull gleam of the brass button in the dead man's hand would have drawn the sight of any one, more particularly any one in Hume's condition. Thus, the mechanistic explanation: it was merely a coincidence. And it must be confessed that coincidence has the best of the argument. Yet, after all, it does seem sometimes that these coincidences are remarkable enough to be mistaken for the markings of a design.

To elucidate: the Indians were not interested in metaphysics, but for many moons Nit-ah-sak, the leader, had taken a companion and a dog team, and gone some days travel from the village to meet a great friend. This friend was to Nit-ah-sak a god. He was a white man named Warren—he really had another name, but that name looks better in Debrett—who had said that some day he would come back to the village and Nit-ah-sak.

Now Warren died, as has been elsewhere recorded; but Nit-ah-sak did not know this, although even, if he had, it is not unlikely that he would have gone out to meet him occasionally just the same. This was in that prehistoric period of about 1889, and the village by the sea had not seen a white man since Warren visited it. So, of course, Nit-ah-sak mistook the staggering Hume for his friend Warren.

He was even in doubt for a little while after Hume had been bundled on the sledge, for camp smoke and frost-bites are excellent disguises. Then the brass button fell from the nerveless fingers, and Nit-ah-sak recognized it as Warren's "Totem," which he had prayed to by many a camp-fire—so had Warren's mumbled memories over the button seemed to the simple aborigine.

It was good. Warren, too busy to come himself, had sent a messenger. This messenger must be hurried to the village, and well cared for. All of which was very lucky for Hume—in other words, the "coincidence" saved his life, because the Indian of that place and period had not advanced beyond the German style of treating helpless men.

So Nit-ah-sak tied the button around Hume's neck, because he was afraid of it, and mushed on rapidly, while the wind rose to a howl, and the long pent snow whirled about.

II

"And he said, 'Behold we will test this one with great harshness, that the virtue of him may be magnified in our sight.' "

SO HUME woke to a condition which his ignorance took for granted, and in which he saw nothing remarkable, to a village which regarded him as the brother of a god, whom the god had sent with a message to the village.

The storm had shrieked about a lengthy argument, an argument concerning religion and, consequently, involved. For as the story of Warren had grown, the village memory of him had faded, until in acquiring his godship he had lost some of the lesser attributes of men, while the misty memories of the Indians had given him others which no man, or god, had ever possessed.

And this man whom Nit-ah-sak, now the chief of the tribe, had brought in on his sledge was palpably the brother of the god. This was agreed upon by all the elders who gathered in the tent to argue. But how closely did he resemble his brother? Therein lay the point of difference, and the meat of the argument. For if he were as great a god as his brother, he was certainly not subject to the minor evils of men. But if he were in some degree a god of lesser quality—and Nit-ah-sak loudly upheld this theory—why, then, he must be protected against the evils. And the particular evil in question was death.

There is no doubt that if Warren had not died on the trail, and had come back to visit the village, arriving in the condition in which Hume arrived—why, then his godship would have resulted in his demise. For it is surely sacrilege of the vilest quality

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to remove a god's leg, whatever the progress of the gangrene. But, if the god's brother be not so much a god, and, therefore, be capable of dying like ordinary men, it is obviously necessary to save his life. Therefore, cut off the right leg of the visitor.

But the other side held that when the brother of the god awakened—and he was proably watching them all the time with his eyes shut—he would at once proceed to heal the leg. And imagine his annoyance if he woke up and found no leg left him to heal.

Back came the Nit-ah-sak party, saying that if the brother of the god found fault with the cutting off of his leg, he could easily grow him another; or, failing this power, have his brother, the greater god, arrange the matter of growth for him.

This carried the meeting, and the storm surged about some efficient if rather crude surgery. Happily for the somewhat conscience-stricken Indians, the only shrieks during the operation were uttered by the wind—Hume being still unconscious. What would have happened if he had suddenly recovered consciousness, and made some comment upon the proceedings, is horrible to contemplate.

So Hume awoke, and found himself alone in the hut—his hosts being rather afraid of what he might have to say about his missing member. He felt terribly sick and weak, of course, and somewhat surprised to be alive. Then he began to wonder how badly the leg was infected, and where he was, and why a brass button was tied around his neck—ending by supposing that this last had been put there as a sort of charm, because he had heard of such things, and he wished he could exchange it for a pint of some sort of antiseptic.

Thus he greatly undervalued the button. But apart from these cogitations, he took for granted the kindness of his hosts, as we have said; and being of that type, he took advantage of the situation, and cursed slowness of service instead of being thankful at receiving attention. And between whiles he did some thinking.

He had reached his destination, but as a cripple. What a fool to leave England. A famous football-player, with the profession of medicine waiting to be followed, he had asked a girl to marry him—almost fainting with surprise when she refused.

Then had come to him the moment which comes to every man. He would shake the dust of home from his feet, and end his days in some foreign spot. England was a narrow country, anyhow. Why not go back to the natural life? The "natural life" at the back of his mind was that of a loafing beachcomber in an island in the South Seas, surrounded by numerous dusky and accommodating ladies, and with no work anywhere in sight.

It is a common desire, but few are hardy or foolish enough to put it to the test. Those who do, generally come back—if they can get back—considerably wiser men. And, if the accident had not come to him, Hume would have gone back, too—and gone back wiser. For he had seen the folly of taking any woman so much to heart.

But his streak of obstinacy had sent him headlong. He had just enough money to get somewhere, and a strain of strength in his make-up had made him debate between the lotus-eating South, and the blubber-eating North—finally, as we have seen, choosing the North—As a matter of fact, he had heard of gold in the North, but of none in the South—He had also heard of this Indian village where few white men had penetrated, and which seemed so far away as to be more of a legend than a reality, where the nights and days were months in length.

The last of his money had gone in a second-rate dog team, but his dogs had taken advantage of his inexperience,—he had started alone, without a word about his destination—and had bolted with his sledge and most of the outfit, leaving him the little we saw when we met him.

And now, rather proud of getting to the place he had started for, he had nothing to do but curse the folly that had sent him there, forgetting, as men do, that the lure of travel and exploration, and the dream of some day bragging of his adventures, had made up at least four-tenths of the aforesaid folly. You see, Hume was barely twenty-three.

But the Indians were bitterly disappointed. Months loom in their minds as years loom in the minds of the white man, and to their notion Warren had been gone so long from them that a word from him was greatly needed.

The weird totem on the wind-swept beach, carved by the medicine-man who was the high-priest of the Warren cult, no doubt did its best to answer the many questions flung at it, but the interpretations of

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its words conveyed to the tribe by the medicine-man were unsatisfying. They wanted real words from the living god of their creed.

Imagine, then, how they waited for his supposed messenger to speak, and picture their agony when he had nothing to say—when they found he knew as little about their jargon as they did about his language. Then, naturally, their disappointment turned into anger, in spite of all that Nit-ah-sak could do to explain the anomaly of a messenger without not only a message but also talk of any kind—Nit-ah-sak being compelled to come to Hume's defense to square himself for having brought him to the village, as it were.

Eventually the matter simmered down into Hume's presence in the village being tolerated much as other communities tolerate a stray dog, and he was allowed to hustle his own grub, and thereby furnish amusement, for he was very much the tenderfoot—with one foot missing.

This was, of course, after his wound had healed. While he lay in the hut he had been a god's messenger, and he had been so treated. It was after his recovery that his credentials were found to be spurious.

Yet it was all a test—the test. The test that comes, in many various forms, to every man. Which explains the crucible called the "world," into which we are put by that Power Who, having a lengthy job for each of us hereafter, requires us to prove our fitness.

BUT HUME failed to assay twenty-four carat, or anything like pure gold. The long dark told on his sense of decency, and the ministrations of the Indians made him querulous and insufferably selfish. He grew too lazy to stir hand or foot without assistance, and he eternally swore at everybody and at the manner in which his leg had been amputated—sometimes going so far as to yell that there had been no need for the operation.

And he was not at all grateful when the wound healed miraculously without infection, and he never dreamed that the tolerance of his willing hosts was due to the button tied around his neck, although some instinct prevented his removing it.

But there came a day when the button was taken away from him, and with it went all the reverence in which he had wallowed. His calls met with no response, and no food was brought to him, so that in the end he was forced to drag himself to Nit-ah-sak, who threw meat at him as if he had been a dog. Hume's humiliation was complete, but while he believed it to be retaliation due to his ingratitude he failed to profit by the implied lesson.

It was a hard test, and a great chance for Hume to prove himself; but he had sunk so low in soul that all he cared for was food and sleep. But he did regret that he had not gone to the Southern Seas. On some orange-hung island a dusky girl would have been a crutch making life bearable, but he could not look on a fur-clad squaw and find consolation. He did not realize that not a solitary woman in the village would have had anything to do with him.

A white man could hardly have fallen lower, although Hume was not responsible for it all. Action and reaction are equal and opposite, and even Indians will become excessively iconoclastic when they discover, or come to the conclusion—which is the same thing—that they have abased themselves before one who was not the god they thought him to be.

And so the weary time dragged on, until Hume, casting about for some one whom he could blame for his troubles, fastened his sorrows upon the girl who had refused to marry him. She had not jilted him, but simply told him that she was going to marry another man, but Hume was not interested in being just—he wanted the revenge feeling, some one with whom he could feel it was his duty to get even.

So, some day he would get even with the girl and the man she had married. Yes, they were to blame for the rotten way the Indians treated him—a treatment without parallel in the Arctic. And Hume would get even. He did not know how he would get even, but get even he would. "You wait and see," as the small boy shouts, expressed his attitude. And meanwhile Nitah-sak threw him occasional scraps of meat.

With the coming of Spring, Hume found enough energy to construct a makeshift crutch, but not enough to wash himself. It was lucky he did this, because Nit-ah-sak's gestures informed him one morning that he was no longer wanted in the village. On a small sledge, which he could drag himself, was a few weeks' food, and a fur robe—generosity due to a slight revulsion of feeling

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upon the part of the chief, who was beginning to fear that he had made some mistake —that, after all, Warren might have sent the white man who had only one leg.

And the entire village was similarly affected. Their collective intelligence had come back to the question of the button. It was certainly the totem of the god. They did not know that Warren was dead, or that Hume had found the button, consequently Warren had given the button to the white man with one leg. But to cap the thing, the medicine-man dreamed that Warren came to him—that is, the medicine-man said he did—and asked him why he had failed to understand the message of his totem.

There was a hidden meaning somewhere, and since the best intelligences of the village could not interpret it, it were wise to get rid of both the messenger and the totem. With Indian logic, they assumed that if Hume went back with his button, Warren would blame him, and not the village, for the failure of his mission.

So, luckily for Hume, back he was to be sent. No more beggings for food, no more revilings—he was again the messenger of the god, with the brass button gravely returned to him. Silently the entire tribe watched him go, escorted by Nit-ah-sak and the man who had found him in the first place.

For three days they bore him in their dog sledge, then he awoke one morning alone by the fire, with his small sledge and some weeks' food. And, following certain adventures, he reached the nearest mining-camp in safety—perhaps the most disreputable object that ever foisted itself upon a congregation of white people.

Yet, worse than the appearance of the man was his lack of self-respect, and the itch of his unclean desire to get even for the imagined slight. For such a get-even spirit needs sympathy to batten upon; and Hume began to spend his time telling his troubles to any one who would listen to him. Then the listener would buy a drink, and Hume would bang his fist on the bar, and luridly revel in the picture of his coming revenge.

"She married him, the dirty skunk of a bank clerk," he would rave, "but they'll both be sorry, —— sorry when I get even with 'em for it."

This generally brought another drink. In fact, Hume, like a fortune-teller, only went a certain distance with his story for each quota of recompense. He saw in it a sort of business, for in those days Alaska was very generous to the down and out, and Hume was broke and had only one leg.

So, the other drink being forthcoming—if it were not, a reproachful and staring silence hinted at the need—Hume found it necessary to mumble something about being "done out of the money, too." Just what money, or how he had been "done," he made no attempt to explain. What do you want for two drinks, anyhow?

But it never entered his head to practise medicine, or to inform the community that he was entitled to write M.D. after his name. Even when a serious accident occurred, Hume hung back like any other one-legged bum, and made no attempt to tell the bewildered miners what to do. He seemed to be contented to tell his tale for drink, and gorge the free lunch when he needed to. And the easy-going community tolerated him, and excused him on the ground of his missing leg.

So, the time went by. Hume's beard grew greatly and the dirt on him grew with it, but for some strange reason he took to hiding his wooden leg—asset though it was as regards sympathetic drinks—and he rather ingeniously constructed a sort of filled-in rubber boot, into which the wooden leg fitted snugly.

It was his one vanity, and much amused the camp, because every man and woman in it knew about the missing limb; but it showed that he was not entirely lost to pride, warped though his understanding of it might be.

The camp grew into a place so large that they tagged "City" after its name—there were nearly two hundred inhabitants—and Hume slept in a bit of a room off the back of the largest saloon, where the charitable owner had kept a pet dog, which had died.

III

"And he spoke once more, saying: 'Yet, I pray thee, give him one more trial, that he may prove himself a man.' "

OUTSIDE it was fifty below. So close to the pot-bellied stove that the heat of it drew strange odors from him, Hume crouched in the camp's leading saloon, gambling joint and dance-hall. He was but a few feet from the bar, and ever and anon a surging group of

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revelers, male and female, swayed to refresh themselves—and then some unseen but powerful force pulled Hume away from the stove, to lose his identity in the crowd for whom the drinks had been ordered. After which libation he would return to his solitary musings.

He was feeling very melancholy. Let the tortured piano tickle the feet of the dancers, let the lure of the roulette wheel draw the money from the pockets of the gamblers, let, in short, the whole world rejoice this Christmas Eve, but Hume would not join them—except to drink, when it would have been churlish to refuse. For his sorrows were weighing upon him with great heaviness, and he could see no relief from the pain of them. To describe his symptoms in fewer words, Hume was carrying a melancholy jag.

But with all the weakness of his self-pity a trace of decent disgust at himself was mixed. For what, after all, was the good of his living? He muttered the words questioningly, and spat disdainfully at the stove. Christmas Day tomorrow. He remembered that Christmas Day when he made the touchdown that won the game for England against Wales, and a very real pang of regret made him almost grateful for the shouted offer of another drink.

He went back to the stove again, now cursing the imagined cause of his misfortune. He did not have to tell his oft-repeated tale this evening to obtain drink, but habit is so strong that he told it to himself—he had told it so often that he thoroughly believed every word of it—and by and by he managed to work himself into a more pleasant state of mind than that of the melancholia—the "some-day-I'll-get-even" state—thus he began to enjoy himself, and, accepting the boundless hospitality offered, he no longer found it necessary to ask himself "what was the good of living?"

Midnight passed, and the noise of jollity increased to a meaningless roar, while the spirit of Christmas swam in whisky. Then, during a lull in the drinking, when the bar was deserted for the floor of the dance-hall, the outer door was hurriedly pushed open, and a man in furs came in running.

"Where is there a doctor?" he asked anxiously.

The bartender looked the man over with insulting deliberation, removed the cigar from his mouth and neatly put the cuspidor to that use for which it was made.

"Ain't none," he answered luminously.

"That's what they told me everywhere else—are you sure?" asked the man in a frantic way, and in an accent foreign to the usual accent of the camp.

The bartender frowned. The fellow had been told there was no doctor in camp, and yet he had to come bothering this way. He was about to administer a tongue thrashing when something like sympathy for the other's evident distress changed his answer. He pointed to a shelf behind the bar.

"See that bag? Well, 'bout three months since, old Doc Billings put it there. Said he'd leave it there while he went and played the wheel some."

"Yes—yes?" broke in the other desperately.

"Well, I'm telling you. He hoists a drink into him, does the doc, and then he just naturally falls down dead, right where you're standing now. So there ain't no doctor in the city any more; and there ain't likely to be till another one comes."

The young man groaned, and turned away—bumping into Hume as he did so. For Hume had been listening with intense curiosity to the dialogue. Then, as the young man went out of the saloon, Hume asked the bartender a question.

"Him?" was the answer. "I don't know his name, but he's living—him and his wife and a little kid—up in that cabin Jack Simms used to live in. You know—little bit of a shack. Suppose the poor —— chechaco got it cheap. I wonder what them ignorant fellers wants to come out to this country at all for. And him bringing his wife an' kid, too.

"No, I ain't seen them. But it must be one of 'em what's sick. A man that ain't got more sense than to bring his wife to this country deserves to have her sick. The only kind able to stand it is them." And he pointed to the various painted ladies of the dance hall who led in the camp's popularity. "What you grinning at?"

"Oh, nothing," said Hume, straightening his face, for, in truth, he was grinning evilly.

It was not surprising that he had been unaware of the doctor-seeking young man's presence in the city, because the young

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man did not frequent the saloon, and Hume went nowhere else. Thus, they had never met—that is, in that city. But the god of the chances had been busy in his cups, and he had juggled affairs to his liking. Or it may have been that the bibulous deity had grown tired of Hume's eternal plaint about getting even, and had, therefore, sent him the opportunity he said he craved.

For the young man who had come seeking a doctor was the successful suitor, who had married the girl Hume wanted. It was very likely, therefore, that the woman whom Hume held responsible for all his troubles was the one in need of a physician. Which was the reason the bartender asked Hume what he was grinning at.

He couldn't help grinning, until the bartender's question made him cautious. The scheme which had come full-fledged to his mind was one that made him happy, very happy. So long had he dwelt upon his tale about revenge that he had come to believe his "honor" demanded it. To forego the chance now offered him for getting even was out of the question.

Besides, it was such a clever plan. Indeed he so admired it that he was tempted to take the bartender into his confidence—until he remembered just in time that it was necessary he should steal the medical bag owned by the late Doctor Billings, of tearful memory.

Without the bag his revenge would be incomplete. He knew the bartender too well—and the bartender knew Hume too well—to think of trying to borrow it. No, it had to be stolen; and because the bartender might object to that part of Hume's plan, he had to forego the pleasure of talking about it.

He was rather drunk, but he rapidly muffled himself in his cap and outer garments. Then, with a swiftness and dexterity that surprised even himself, he made one grab for the bag, and the next moment it was under his coat. In another minute he was standing under the stars, in the biting cold—a cold so keen that it almost froze the spirit of his revenge and sent him back into the pleasant sphere of free drinks.

But, as we have noticed before, there was a strain of doggedness in Hume; and he kept his back turned to the tempting saloon, and went along the street as rapidly as his rubber-boot foot would permit. The foolish bank clerk had no doubt come to the country seeking gold, but Hume wasted no time thinking about that. For the phenomenon was a pitiably common one, and ninety per cent. of the weaklings who so selfishly or foolishly brought their families with them were office men—other men knew better.

And the woman had refused to marry him. He looked up at the stars, and laughed. Then he confidentially explained just how he was going to get even. He was not afraid to talk to the stars now—indeed, the sound of his own voice was most pleasant music to his ears.

A ring of pride thrilled his utterance. After all their abuse of him, after all his sufferings, after it all—he was going to get even. And get even with a devilish ingenuity, too. There are times when a satanic schemer gets encouragement from a fancied relationship to the prince of darkness.

HE DID not have far to walk. The cabin stood alone—one of the oldest shacks, a relic of the old times. It did not boast of a window, but Hume did not need to be told that he would find the family at home and awake. Panting somewhat from excitement, he knocked on the door. Then he sought professional calm, for it was no part of his plan that he should be immediately recognized.

The wild-eyed bank clerk opened the door, and Hume pushed past him.

"You wanted a doctor?" he said briefly, looking 'round the barely furnished place.

The woman, bending over a cot in the corner, turned to meet him. She was Hume's old sweetheart, but the charm that had once attracted him was no more. Thin and worn, the lines of care and pain had aged her long past the years' legitimate markings.

"It's—my—the little girl," she faltered, indicating the cot.

Their eyes met. In hers was a consternation, fear, disappointment—for a moment he thought he was recognized—then he understood. In the history of modern medicine, no doctor had looked as he looked. The natty professional appearance, the cleanness—the drunken, cadging bum showed never a trace of these.

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Small wonder the poor woman looked at him in consternation.

And in that look—mirrored in the eyes he had once so dearly loved—Hume saw himself as others saw him, only more so. It was a rare privilege, a favor granted to the few—for it is a fact that no man, good or bad, can see himself as he really is and remain in that condition. Lying between what he thought he was and what he sees he is, is a valley of shame which ever after he will seek to bridge with good deeds.

"Been out on the trail—sick miner—let me see the baby," he grunted, trying to hide his self-disgust.

He began to open his bag as he followed her to the cot—a sudden fear that it might be locked hurrying him—and he was shaking a thermometer in an unaccustomed hand when he reached the cot side. But he did not need it—fever, high fever showed on the little flushed face too clearly, and the breathing of the child told even Hume's slight experience all he required to know. It was diphtheria, and a very bad and far-gone case.

All thought of his getting even had left him, for, looking down on the child, his consciousness had room for but one thing—the child would die unless something were done to save it, and, even then, it would be touch and go. The new antitoxin treatment had been coming into vogue when Hume left England, but where in the Arctic was a syringe of serum? Not in the bag of the late Doctor Billings.

The father and mother watched him fearfully. They were of the helpless type at the best, and in such a time of stress were more of a hindrance than an aid. And, regarding their child's illness, they had no more idea than the man in the moon. Yet, some sort of instinct, rather than the child's struggle to breathe, warned them of the danger.

"Hot water," growled Hume, to keep the parents occupied.

The little one's mouth was open, and Hume, looking into it, smiled curiously. It was not at all the smile of Hume the drunkard, Hume the bum. And the thoughts racing through his mind were not about getting even. For, looking into the mouth of that child, Hume had looked into the jaws of death, and he was weighing the chances.

There was only one thing to be done to save the child. If it were done, the child would have a fifty-fifty chance—an even break for life. But what about the person doing that thing—in this case Hume? What chance would he have?

Now, if there were enough antitoxin—but he dismissed that "if." There wasn't any. Of course, if a man lived a clean life, avoided booze, and kept himself in the very best physical condition . . . Hume dismissed that side of the argument also. He reminded himself that he, Hume, was the man under consideration—not Galahad.

Well, then—take a low-down cuss, with a blood count of less than four million reds, and a very inactive phagocytosis, and no resistance at all. In a less exact way—for this was before the days of the spread of Erlich's theory—Hume pictured his blood stream, and added arterio-sclerosis and a leaky heart, with a touch of nephritis, to the somewhat unattractive result.

Then he found a key he had not used for many years, cleared the gathered grime from the lock of the door of his holy of holies, and—which he had not done for many, many years—faced his soul. The result of this careful self-scrutiny was that he asked himself the question of the earlier part of the evening: what, after all, was the good of his living?

Which was more or less camouflage—that English habit of bringing heroism within the sphere of logical necessity.

The mother brought the water. It was characteristic of her that it was barely warm, not hot.

"Really," thought Hume, still justifying his extraordinary behavior, "I was lucky not to marry her."

And then, quite in a matter of course way—as if it were a part of every doctor's day's work—Hume went about his terrible job. And the parents watched him with such an inane lack of understanding that he was positively amused. Several times did Hume insert the glass tube, and suck the deadly mucus from the child's throat; and easier and easier did its breathing become.

IT WAS a tired, and different, Hume that sought rest late that Christmas morning in the bit of a place off the saloon, where the kindly proprietor had kept the dog that died.

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A FEW days later, the bank clerk again sought the doctor. The child was well again, and he thought he ought to let the doctor know this. He had expected him to call, or send his bill, or something, but nothing had been seen or heard of him since he left the cabin on Christmas morning.

Again the bank clerk questioned the bartender whom he had questioned on Christmas Eve, and that worthy reached for a certain useful weapon, but scorning to use it, made answer:

"Doctor! You must be crazy about doctors. Didn't I tell you there ain't none? And you ain't the only guy needin' a doctor, neither. There was that poor old one-legged bum that choked to death with the 'hooping cough, or something. He needed a doctor, too. But there ain't none."

AN ECHO FROM THE CUSTER FIGHT

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

AMONG the three or four bodies of officers who died with Custer in his last lamentable fight on the Little Big Horn, June 25, 1876, and which never were recovered or accounted for in any manner, was that of Second Lieutenant H. M. Harrington. It was supposed that he fell in the first fighting near the ford, and was swallowed up in the treacherous quicksands in the bed of the Little Big Horn.

Frank Grouard, the noted scout, who was taken prisoner in 1869 by Sitting Bull, with whom he lived for five years, was told a story after the Custer fight which probably sets at rest the real fate of Lieutenant Harrington.

It appears that when the charge up the bluffs was made, the Indians told Grouard, one officer mounted on a magnificent animal, rode directly through the Indian lines, escaping the hundreds of bullets that were fired at him. Some of the young braves gave chase, but as they were on foot when the charge was made, and lost some time in getting their ponies, the officer was soon far in advance of his pursuers. They followed him for several miles and watched him as he crossed Poplar Creek, due east from the Custer battle-field.

Beyond this creek was an immense flat, across which the officer's horse carried him at breakneck speed. The pursuing Indians, realizing that they would not be able to overtake the white horseman, sat on their halted ponies and watched to see what happened. Suddenly, to their astonishment, they saw a puff of smoke, and the officer fell from his horse. The Indians whipped up their ponies and raced over to the flat.

When they reached the spot the officer was dead. They secured the horse and trappings, but left the body where it fell, not even taking the scalp, as Indians have a superstition about scalping a man who commits suicide.

Grouard's explanation is that the officer, being convinced that the command would perish to a man, did not wish to survive his comrades-in-arms, so put an end to his own life, just when escape was within his grasp; or that, fearing his escape would be construed into desertion, and being unable to rejoin his command, he ended his life within sight of the spot where the flower of the famous Seventh Cavalry met their Waterloo.

The story of the Indians is borne out by the fact that the body of Lieutenant Harrington was never recovered, and it is possible that he found death on the plain beyond Poplar Creek, though it must be admitted that nothing but the fact that his body was not found on the battle-field lends any evidence to his identification as the officer referred to by the Sioux.

Had this officer not lost his nerve just when escape was within his reach many of the conflicting stories regarding the reason for the death of Custer and two hundred and twelve of his immediate command might have been solved. But as nobody but Curley, Custer's Crow scout, came out of the conflict alive, and Curley's stories have been found to be very conflicting, there is nothing but the stories told by the Indians themselves by which to trace the movements of Custer after he separated from Reno and Benteen. It was the first and only time that "Custer's luck," as he was wont to call it, failed the great cavalry leader.

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GABOREAU THE TERRIBLE

A Five-Part Story
Part III
By
Gordon Young

Author of "Gaboreau," "Murder!" etc.

The first part of the story quickly retold in story form.

I will torture you for six months. Then kill you.
G.

One night several weeks after I had received this strange note I paced the dark rainy streets with thoughts of its writer uppermost in my mind. I knew that "G" stood for Gaboreau and that Gaboreau made no idle threats. Yet I was not afraid. Clever and powerful as I knew Gaboreau to be, I felt that I was his match.

Suddenly from the shadows staggered the slight figure of a boy.

"German spies have murdered me," he whispered, and fainted in my arms.

I looked at him closely. He seemed almost cut to pieces. His features were aristocratic and unmistakably French.

I did not call the police. Perhaps you will think that I took matters too much in my own hands. Yet I knew I was justified. I knew the bungling efforts of the police. And if there is anything I detest it is a German spy. I was determined to seek out the Teuton devils who were behind the attempted assassination of this boy. My years as professional gambler and my experiences in combating the fiendish cunning of the crippled Gaboreau had put me up against stranger situations than this.

I carried the boy to a door near by and rapped. A pale girl with blonde bobbed hair opened. A few words explained the situation. I left the boy in her dingy room and went for a taxi.

A blow upon the head with my automatic persuaded the reluctant chauffeur of the first car I met to put himself and his motor at my disposal, despite the shrill protest of his passenger, a hard-faced overdressed woman.

As we carried the wounded boy into the car, a man came out of the shadows, looked at the lad and gave the women a stare of recognition.

It was apparent that the two knew more than a little about this strange affair.

Determined to sift the matter to the bottom, I forced the man to get into the car and gave the chauffeur my address. The pale little blonde, who said her name was Bessie, came also. On the way to my house the man whispered to the woman, in German——

"What will H say?"

AT HOME I found another message awaiting me.

You will find arsenic in your coffee-can in pantry. This is to show you I hold your life in the hollow of my hand. Some day I will close that hand.
G.

I sent for Dr. Roberts to attend to the wounded boy. Then I started my cross-examination of the woman who had been the limousine's passenger.

"Who is H?" I asked.

"I won't tell you."

"Speaking of initials, what do you think G might stand for? Gaboreau, for example?"

I had taken a long chance and had won. She was frightened speechless. The name of the powerful crook was a word to conjure with. By skilful employment of it I elicited from the woman the information that H was a German agent.

"I was going to keep an appointment with him when you stopped my car," she said. "Mr. Smith, the man you made come along with us, is working for him also."

Believing that fear of Gaboreau would keep her from doing any harm, I let her go. She had to drive her car herself. Her chauffeur was dead drunk.

George Barton, my butler, had seen to that. A few rye highballs had made the chauffeur very loquacious.

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"Said his name was 'Bad Bill' Condon," remarked George. "The lady's name is Leonore Musset and she lives at 5-A Kingston Apartments."

I turned my attention to Mr. Smith, who had been sitting in the dining-room under the watchful eye of my mute Chinese, Yang Li.

"Ever hear of Gaboreau?" I began.

He had. The effect upon him of that name was more startling than it had been upon the woman.

It was but little trouble to get his story. H was at war to the knife with Gaboreau. Why, Smith did not know. H had "been interested in" the boy who now lay wounded up-stairs. The boy's name was Jean Latour. Smith had been following him for some time. That night he had seen the boy going toward the place where H had made an appointment with Smith. Two men had come out of an entrance and stabbed the boy about five minutes before I came up.

More than that he refused to tell. He did not know anything about the boy he had been following, he said.

I let him go and went up to where Dr. Roberts sat by the boy's bedside.

"Dangerous, but won't die," muttered the physician in answer to my question.

"Handsome boy, isn't he?"

"Boy, ——! It's a girl."

I did not sleep that night. There was too much to be done. I wrote a note or two and used the telephone a few times. I had much better allies than the police could be. I could call upon men like George Barton, who was as dignified as a bishop and as strong as a Jap wrestler—and whose finger-prints were in every police-station in the country; men like the mute Yang Li, who was an artist with an eight-inch knife that had a blade like a razor.

The next morning Vivian, my wife, who had been visiting my sister, came home, bringing my nephew Rob. It required a little explaining to account for the presence of the wounded girl and her nurse, and for the blonde Bessie, who had stayed overnight. George had dismissed the servants after the coffee episode and had filled the house with some villainous-looking creatures whom I knew to be acquaintances of his, chosen against the time when I should have need for a strong bodyguard.

That night there came a telegram.

At nine o'clock there will be a shot through the window and you will need another statue on your mantel. Sooner than you expect a shot just as accurate will be aimed at you. G.

It was then twenty minutes of eight.

DINNER that night was served by "Black Mike," as forbidding an individual as one might find in a month's search of prisons. George had carefully coached him for the occasion, but he forgot most of his tutelage and addressed himself almost exclusively to Bessie:

"Little more Adam's ale, miss? Have another sinker? Aw, g'wan. There's——"

Crash! Every one jumped up. I looked at my watch. Gaboreau had shot the statue—three-quarters of an hour ahead of time.

During the excitement I saw Yang Li beckoning me, and I followed him to the garage. There I found my chauffeur, Jerry Kelly, standing guard over a man who crouched in a corner.

"Yang caught him prowling around the house and brought him here 'bout half an hour ago," said Jerry.

At first the fellow refused to answer my questions. But skilful use of the name of Gaboreau, mingled with some vague threats, soon gave me his story. His name was Robert Henshaw, and he was in the employ of H. He did not know anything about the shooting.

"I was sent to America by the German secret service," he said, "and when Bernstorff was sent home I was attached to H. He told me to get into your house and find out what I could. Said you were close to Gaboreau."

I felt that Henshaw might be useful to me later on. So I forced him to write a compromising letter which put him pretty well in my power, and then let him go.

Jeanne had been getting worse. I went up to see her.

"I must go to my uncle," she whispered faintly as I leaned over the bed. But those were the only coherent words she spoke.

That night came another telegram:

You will be dead inside of a week. G.

Early the next morning I kept an appointment with a man from a wax-work shop. He measured me carefully, as for a suit of clothes, and sketched a remarkable likeness of my face.

"Your order will be filled by tomorrow noon," he promised as he left.

The telephone rang. It was Henshaw.

"I have been doing a little investigating, Mr. Everhard or Richmond, or whatever you call yourself," he said, "and I don't believe either of those names is your right one."

"Who am I, then?"

"You are Gaboreau!"

He went on to back up his statement by a series of remarkable deductions. He was a clever guesser. The only trouble was that he guessed wrong.

My library was in darkness as I strolled into it about nine o'clock that night. As I reached for a light I heard a slight movement near the window.

"Who's there?" I cried.

No answer.

I shot. Immediately I was sorry I had done so. For as the light flashed on I saw Bessie clinging to Black Mike, on whose broad chest was forming a bright stain. My bullet had interrupted their wooing. Thank God, the wound was not fatal.

As we carried Mike up-stairs the doorbell rang. It was Vivian and Rob. Vivian's key would not fit. Some one had been tampering with the lock.

Rob, who had youth's enormous appetite, made a bee-line for the kitchen. A moment later he came dashing back. His eyes were wide with horror as he gasped:

"The kitchen's full of dead men! And blood—everywhere!"

I WENT into the kitchen. There, lying in the blood which had poured from their half-severed throats, were the bodies of three of the men whom George had hired to protect me.

But one thing could be done. Hastily George and Jerry were summoned. We carried the bodies out to the limousine. Jerry quickly altered the license-plate. Then we sped out through the dark, deserted streets toward a lonely district of the city.

We had gone but a little way when I saw a car in

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close pursuit. We turned a sudden corner and I ordered Jerry to stop dead. The other car rushed up and stopped beside us.

There was not much of a fight. In a few minutes our pursuers became our prisoners, and the corpses were transferred to their machine. We sped away just as a patrol-wagon came into sight.

We took the men into my cellar and turned on the light. I saw that I had captured Condon, Henshaw and a third who said his name was Gregory.

"Hello, Henshaw," I said, shaking him by the hand.

His companions stared at him in surprise and suspicion. This was as I had planned. In a short time I had them believing that Henshaw had double-crossed them.

"You dog!" shouted Gregory at Henshaw. "I'll get you for this!"

I took Henshaw into another room. "I'll talk," he gasped, "but for God's sake don't let those fellows get me. They got three of your fellows tonight."

"Who did it?"

"A fellow they call the 'Butcher.' One of H's men."

"You think I am Gaboreau?"

"Yes. So does H."

"Then why doesn't he try to kill me?"

"He wants to find out where the gold is."

"What gold?"

"You know."

"Yes, but tell me your version of it."

I felt that at last I was going to discover the reason for the war between Gaboreau and H.

"Well, you know that H is a sort of paymaster for the German secret service in this country. He had about a million and a half, in gold, in his possession. It was packed in little boxes and stored away in a room under the guard of six Prussian reservists.

"Then Gaboreau got on to it. A week ago he backed a van up to the house and took away gold, reservists, and all. Later the reservists were found one by one, dead."

Here was a new angle to the affair. I let Henshaw go. I knew he was too frightened to try to harm me. And some time when he had an appointment with H I expected to keep it for him.

Before I went to bed I gave George an order that must have startled him considerably.

"Order seven loads of manure at once," I said, "and have two of them spread on the lawn to-morrow. Be sure to have the lawn well covered."

Then I went to bed, with Yang Li watching by my window.

IV

I AWOKE several times before it was fully daylight, then went into a fairly restful sleep and awakened about eight o'clock being aware of a soft rubbing sound. Yang was still sitting under the window, a small dish heaped with burned cigarets was by him and between his lips was still another cigaret, while on his knee rested a small oilstone and back and forth across it with deft wrist he was passing the long, thin blade.

"I don't think much of that knife of yours if you have to spend all your time sharpening it," I said.

He looked up with the trace of a smile. The knife was probably made of the best steel on earth and he knew it, so he could afford to be amused by criticism.

"And we must be losing our nerve, Yang, if we have to sit up all night like old maids too scared to go to bed for fear a burglar will crawl out from under it. Some people are just that afraid to look under their beds and reassure themselves."

Incidentally I do not happen to be one of them. I often look under the bed, as well as in the closets.

Yang plucked a light feather, a downy feather, from an envelop that he drew from his pocket, and standing up he held the feather above his head with his left hand. The feather floated from his fingers, then a dazzling whirl of steel flashed about it. A second or two of that play, then Yang jumped back, and striking out with a quick upward thrust unerringly cut that feather in two and the pieces, so light as to be blown by a casual breath, swam unsteadily downward. I once saw a powerful knife-fighter win a bet by severing the leg of a chair with one clean stroke of a bowie, but not even he could have cut in two a floating feather.

And it may here be remarked that those experienced in the quick, passionate tragedies that leap up among men who are a law unto themselves are inclined to be more fearful of the knife than of the gun. I have heard many a man, unquestionable as to courage, oft proven as to prowess, say that he would rather be locked unarmed in a room with a man who held a gun than with one who held a knife. The knife is a terrible weapon—and silent.

I WENT up-stairs and was enjoying an icy shower when George tapped on the door and said that Dr. Roberts was on the verge of apoplexy.

The doctor being a lean and lined man, though irascible, did not seem susceptible to an attack of the kind, so applying corkscrew methods to George, I got from him the fact that Dr. Roberts was kicking his heels at

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the front door and impatiently awaiting my permission to enter. George had followed instructions literally, and barred even him.

An hour later I was sitting down to coffee and an egg when the doctor came into the dining-room, and after grumbling enough to let me know that he was really in an agreeable mood, he joined me with a cup of coffee.

"Lucky man. Lucky man," he said, slumping down almost on to his shoulders and glaring across at me.

"I have a scar or two that keeps me reminded of it," I said.

"The girl's clear-headed this morning. Won't have to have a coroner. The man—what's his name? Mike, yes. Mike is doing well. I didn't know that girl—I don't mean Miss Latour—the other one—was so good-looking. By thunder, she is pretty. Great nurse. Never had a patient come out from under a shock so nicely. You're lucky. Lucky."

"It would be all right for me to talk with Miss Latour this morning?"

"If you don't get her excited. She talked about you. Asked a million questions. I told her you were a good Samaritan. And Mrs. Morrison raised her eyes and dropped her mouth at that. Mrs. Morrison told me confidentially that she thought there was something mysterious and sinister about you—about this house. Said she didn't like it. Yes. She didn't like it. Now what would you have done if both those people had died on your hands—what could you have done?"

"I would probably have suggested to a certain physician that he report an epidemic of pneumonia."

"But the undertaker?"

"I would have—let me see—I don't know exactly what I would have done, but perhaps I could have engaged a few detective agencies to find something blackmailable on one of the city's understudies to the Angel of Death."

"Sometimes I wonder about you. Have you really done the things that they say?"

"Who are 'they'?"

"Various people. The name of Everhard is pretty well known."

"No. I haven't. Not one-tenth."

"I wonder. By the way, seen the paper this morning?"

I indicated the crumpled newspaper that I had thrown to one side.

"Munition train blown up. Right here in New York. Awful. Germans suspected. 'Suspected'! Why aren't they shot? I ask you, why aren't they shot? We are at war. Hear me? War. Not a spy has been shot. Why? We don't know we are at war. We are sending a million of our best to kill and be killed by Germans in uniform, but these vipers right in our midst that kill civilians, put bombs on transports, steal military secrets, blow up factories, they—they, I say—are put into detention camps and fed and clothed out of the money paid by the fathers and brothers and uncles of our own soldiers!"

The doctor, terribly excited, leaped up with an oath of anger and brought down his fist on the table, making the cups clatter as he finished.

"You—why don't you go after a few of these spies?" he asked more calmly, but his hand shook as he lifted the cup toward his lips. And he added grimly: "I'll sign a death-certificate for pneumonia and find an undertaker patriotic as myself!"

I smiled slightly, as though such a thing was outside of my interest, and explained nothing. It is well not to take even the most sympathetic into one's confidence—not until they have work to do.

Dr. Roberts looked at his watch, complained that he had wasted a precious half-hour, and hurried out.

I WENT to call on Miss Latour and found her taking warm milk and toast that Vivian's maid had prepared. Our household was pretty much upset, and I had wholly forgotten the commissary needs. But Vivian, with a housewifely eye for such things, had attended to them.

Dr. Roberts had not told her that I was sometimes called Everhard, which is a wonder for he really liked to gossip, or more justly perhaps he really liked the romantic, surprising thrills of life.

She was still weak, but looked rather attractive in the cap and lacey arms and throat of what Vivian called a "dream dress." Miss Latour's was a cameo, patrician face. I wondered that she would have attempted to masquerade as a boy; yet even I had not suspected her sex.

She told me that it had been extremely good of me to take her in, and that I was truly as Dr. Roberts had said, a Samaritan.

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Her voice was pleasant, cultured; but there was nothing wheedling about it, no affectation.

"My uncle—he must be nearly insane with worry. My poor uncle! He is an invalid, Mr. Richmond. And I was on an —I was going to say an errand for him, but that is not quite right. Anyway, I was going to do something that he could not do—something that he could not do for himself, but he did not know I was going. He can not leave his wheel-chair. That is why you found me dressed as I was. A woman could not have gone there without risks, and even as it was I was unfortunate."

I listened. I was interested. I had—as may be surmised—unusual reasons for being interested. I did not want to excite her, but I wanted to find out certain things, particularly the address of her uncle. But I could wait my time.

"Have you an idea as to who the assassins were?" I asked.

"They must have been robbers."

"Possibly. But you mentioned 'German spies' ——"

"Did I?" she gasped, a flash of fright crossing her face.

Then quickly regaining control of herself, and with that rare art peculiar to women of all ages, she tried to persuade me that she must have been out of her mind, telling me that she was French, and had unusual reasons for hating Germans. But spies—no. They could not have been that.

Evidently she did not wish to take me into her confidence.

"But robbers do not usually stab, and——"

I paused. She was visibly perturbed that I had mentioned "spies," and wished poignantly that I would credit it to her nervous, wrought condition at the time.

"And the only other obvious deduction," I added to ease her mind, "is that you must have been mistaken for some one else."

"That must have been it," she agreed quickly, as though convinced. "But you will please notify my uncle, Mr. Richmond. Tell him I am not badly hurt but have him come at once, please. He did not know that I was going when I did."

"Certainly, I'll telephone right away."

"You can't reach him by telephone. He is in the city. M. Jean Latour, 6430 Fenelon Avenue. He will wish to come at once, but he is very sensitive about his condition in public. He must be carried to and from his car, and it humiliates him dreadfully. He was once a colonel of chasseurs, Mr. Richmond. In the Franco-Prussian War. How bitterly he hates Germany! We all do, as you know. I am French as I told you—and what my poor people have gone through."

Her voice broke slightly. She paused, then added:

"And he—he was paralyzed from the waist down by a bullet received in a charge. It was the greatest day of his life when America went to war for France! He follows the war millimeter by millimeter on the maps, moving his pens and flags as edition after edition of the papers are brought to him. He is a wonderful old man, and I love him—oh, much more than one might love an uncle one has really known only a short while.

"You will bring him to me, right away, won't you? The doctor refused to let me be moved, though I begged him. I almost wept. Not that I was so anxious to leave your hospitable roof, but my uncle is all that is left to me. My parents, Mr. Richmond, lived at Nantes—when the Germans came."

Her lips contracted, tears were in her eyes. But she was of the race from whence sprang Joan d'Arc; and one of the women of a land that dared not weep lest the flood from so many sorrow-haunted eyes deluge France.

I was very much moved with sympathy for her. And more incomprehensibly, I was almost touched with sympathy for this uncle of hers.

"And you?" I asked.

"I was at Paris. When war came my father telegraphed me to stay there, that mother would join me. But she refused to leave him. My father and mother were made hostages—and executed together. Oh, my uncle grows terrible, I am really afraid at times, when he speaks of his brother's, my father's, murder. His fingers clutch at the air as though reaching for the throats of invisible Huns, and he cries out that he would like to put every German on earth to a miserable death! It is fearful. But my uncle is a poor, lonesome, crippled old man who has brooded on *revanche* for forty years. You will bring him to me, won't you, Mr. Richmond?"

"I will do my best," I said, and felt a liar's guilt as I said it.

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I scarcely knew what I would do about it.

"He will come. We are all that either has left."

"Would you mind," I said, veering the subject abruptly, "telling if you have ever heard of a Frenchman called Gaboreau?"

"That is strange. My uncle asked me that only a few days ago. What of him? Why should you both ask that, and in much the same way?"

"What did your uncle say of him?"

"Nothing. He asked if I had ever heard the name. I had not."

"It may be," I said ambiguously, "that Gaboreau is interested in the attack made on you."

"Gaboreau—a Frenchman? Never!"

"What is in a name? Not necessarily a man's nationality. I know of a German who uses only the letter H."

The remark went to the center of the target. She gave a little surprised gasp, and asked quickly in French:

"What do you know of him, monsieur? Please tell me. It means ——"

She stopped, reluctant to speak to a stranger of what it meant, but her manner one of querying expectancy.

"I really know little, in fact nothing, of him. I have merely heard him spoken of. A munition train was blown up last night in the city—houses wrecked, people killed. I understand Germans are suspected. H, I believe, is said to be their leader."

"Oh, Mr. Richmond, promise me, please promise me, that you will bring my uncle at once? Won't you please? I must see him."

No doubt I could have resisted her. The thing is that I did not. I promised that I would bring her uncle before the day was ended; and at the time I was not forgetful that my promises, even rash ones, are binding. But I reflected that a day does not legally end until midnight, so I had an extension of time.

AS I came down-stairs I met Rob.

"Well, that door's fixed now. The locksmith just left," he said.

"What locksmith?"

"The one you telephoned for of course. He said Mr. Richmond had telephoned. How'd he know about it if you hadn't? You must be losing your memory."

"I telephoned for no locksmith."

"Well somebody did. What are you acting that way about it for. Didn't you want the door fixed?"

"No—not unless I could watch the man that did it."

"I watched him. He took it off and put it back. I was smoking a cigaret out on the porch when he came. It works fine."

I could not tell Rob that he had undoubtedly watched a man get an impression of our lock under his very nose. What had happened, so I guessed, was that the so-called "locksmith," knowing that the door had been tampered with, perhaps doing the tampering himself, had appeared in the morning as though some one had called for him. It was natural to expect that some locksmith would have been called. And he had fixed it—"fixed" it, indeed.

Now I clearly understood why the lock had been tampered with the night before: it gave an excuse for a man to come and get an impress of the key, which Rob had so kindly lent him to try the lock with.

Somebody was evidently planning to come soon by the front door. Well, I judged that they would be surprised, even though my careful instructions to George, about not letting anybody in, had been put to naught by Rob's smoking a cigaret on the front porch.

But at the moment I had other things to think about, too. I could not well go for M. Latour until Mr. Ralston came with the dummy, which George and I alone knew was coming; and though he had promised to have it by noon, at noon he telephoned that it would be late. I do not remember what his excuses were, but something technical; and when a man excuses himself in terms that you can not understand, it is not easy to complain and charge him with having been negligent. So I waited, and after a few hours equivocally explained to Miss Latour that I had not been able to get in touch with her uncle.

She was disturbed, but suggested that perhaps he had been out making inquiries over her disappearance.

"Possibly," I agreed.

I had a talk with George, and I believe that he showed symptoms of excitement before I had finished. It is difficult to imagine the Sphinx in a state of agitation, but less so than to imagine George in that state; so I will not say that he was agitated, but he wiped his solemn face three or four

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times and fingered his handkerchief, crushing it in his powerful fingers, and then fairly scrubbed his forehead where a few drops of perspiration appeared.

Anyway I was at some pains to school him in the instructions that seemed necessary; and among them was the order that a shot must be fired through the window, striking that dummy, even if he had to do it himself, and that it must be done while Miss Latour's uncle was in the house. Furthermore, he must at all costs keep Vivian from getting so close to the dummy that she would recognize it as a thing of wire, rags and wax. She was a good actress but I wished her grief to be genuine—which was heartless of me, but I thought it necessary.

Moreover, Dr. Roberts had to be taken somewhat into my confidence. I telephoned, and after some difficulty succeeded in locating him. He said that it would not be convenient to spend the evening at my house, but that he would do it anyway.

During the afternoon eight large loads of manure arrived. The price was exorbitant because the order had been rushed, and though most of it was dumped at the end of the arbor, a group of laborers quickly spread a layer over the lawn, and Vivian complimented me on remembering a long since made request to have the lawn given attention.

I commandeered one of the servants' rooms on the third floor at the rear of the house, and ordered a repeating shotgun with several boxes of shells sent out. The window commanded an excellent view of the back yard, and even so poor a shot as I imagined Rob to be could spray lead over the narrow strip between the garage and arbor.

I did not know that the window and shotgun would be needed. I rather thought not; but, as I explained to Rob when I took him there and told him to hold himself in readiness to take up his post at the window, I didn't want any one to carry off that fertilizer. It had cost a lot of money and Vivian was very particular about the lawn.

He asked if I had suddenly gone crazy?

But I let the boy think what he pleased; and he retaliated by letting me kick my heels in the ante-room of his confidence, following his remark that he thought Miss Latour "a jolly pretty girl, even if she didn't have any hair."

"How did you come to meet her?"

"How do you suppose I met her? Properly introduced, of course. Vivian and I called this morning. I called this afternoon, too. Lonesome for her. Cheered her up a bit."

"And what did you talk of?"

"You have a cheek, old boy. Ask a chap what he talks of to a pretty girl. Use your imagination. You have a-plenty—getting a shotgun to guard a manure pile."

Impudent and irresponsible as ever, wholly unsobered by the tenseness of the past few hours that had shown him blood and death! Those in their teens and early twenties do not know the blessings of youth—not until later when they have prodigally scattered them down the highway. I doubt not that there were many flirtations, plightings of troth and much love-making when the guillotines of France drank blood; and too, beneath the thunderous bursts of howitzers in these later years, I doubt not that the love-light appeared in French, English and Belgian eyes, but only among the young, the irrepressible, impudent, indomitable youth of the land.

He gave me a condescending slap on the back and clattered gaily down the stairs; wholly unthrilled and unaware of the fact that no man, since I left childhood, had ever presumed to tweak my nose or slap me on the back. I laughed quietly and a kind of warm fondness suddenly appeared in my heart for him.

Youth will not be denied. Guns and blood can not stay love. Under my roof my spoiled and pampered nephew was hurrying to the side of a patrician French girl, caught up wounded from the street; and too another girl—really from the street—was most of the night and the live-long day by the side of a notorious crook, nursing him back to his strength with the love that had flamed between them as a spark flies out when steel strikes flint.

MR. RALSTON came with the dummy. I forgave him the delay. It was a work of art. He had followed instructions well; the eyes were closed, the face pale. Death seemed to have set its seal there. And as I gazed for

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a long time I had a ghostly feeling that I was looking down upon my dead self.

Mr. Ralston was inclined to be inquisitive, but the intimation that I wanted it for a practical joke was acceptable to him. I complimented him. I wrote his check. I showed him to the door and never saw him again.

George and I placed it in a reading-chair, with the back lowered, the foot-rest extended, and having rigged it out in my clothes, it had a very life-like, or rather death-like, appearance. The only incongruous feature was the hair. A toupee-like adornment can scarcely be disguised, but a large cap was fitted on to the head, and I, discarding my soft hat, got out another cap as nearly like it as could be found and wore the cap around the house, or carried it ostentatiously when I was with Vivian.

A few paces away from the thing it looked as if I were asleep; nearer, the pallor showed.

George and I talked as to where it was best to locate the wound, and decided on the temple because it would more readily be seen there, and be the more ghastly. I knew that a bullet-hole may be small, black, on one side; but the other side will be blown out. I trusted to the ignorance and excitement of others not to detect that flaw in our realism; and proceeded to make a hole, which was blackened, just before the left ear.

Something was needed for blood. Paint would do it, or red ink. Either would have served very well, but we had none in the house and I was impatient to complete the dummy, and I wanted it to be convincing or at least realistic to shrewd eyes. Blood was needed and real blood seemed about the only thing immediately available. Yes, that would make it realistic.

And the shrewdest eyes in the world—probably in the whole world—were to scan that face; and, if they were not convinced, then my plans would go a-glimmering.

"A tablespoonful ought to do," I said, musingly.

George went out. He was gone for several minutes. I wondered what he was about, and was ready to go see when he came back with a tea-cup and blood in it.

"Where on earth?"

"Two fellows down-stairs—they don't seem to mind shedding blood," he said owlishly.

I looked at him hard. George was, as I have already tried to convey, an incontinent liar about unimportant things; but often when he was oblique he was truthful. He always thought it a good joke to mislead me.

I searched his face, but one might as well have searched the face of the dummy itself. My eyes wandered to the cup. He held it in his right hand. His left was behind him.

"Here," I said, "hold this," and I handed him the cap from the dummy's head.

He put out his left hand, and a blood-soaked strip of gauze covered the middle finger.

Then my feelings changed. I almost wished that he had extracted the fluid from the so-called Bad Bill Condon.

I succeeded in making what I thought was a very ghastly, realistic wound.

We moved the chair and dummy into a corner and put around a lacquered screen so that it would be out of sight.

But by way of testing the dummy I decided to raise the window, to remove the screen and conceal myself behind it, and wait until George had found Yang and told him that I wanted to see him in the living-room.

Presently Yang came, shuffling noiselessly, rapidly, into the room. The left side, the "wounded" side was near the window and he could not see it until he came close, but his slits of eyes seemed to me as I peered through the crack of the panels to widen a bit as he came closer. It was late afternoon, dusk was beginning to settle, and the twilight was shadowing the room.

Suddenly he stopped and for a moment was poised in a tense stare.

Then from his tongueless mouth there came a low, horrible, inarticulate cry, and quickly he looked about him. He jumped at the window, and I swear that though he leaped his feet came almost noiselessly to the floor. I could tell that his eyes were straining for a glimpse of the fleeing assassin; then he wheeled, and rapidly placing himself at the foot of the chair he whipped the knife from his sleeve, and raising it point-upward toward the ceiling, plainly, though silently, took a blood-vow of vengeance.

I could not let him know that I had been a witness. Of course, only the half-light

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would have deceived those Oriental eyes of his; and whereas I had expected to jest with him for having been tricked by a dummy, I could not even let him know that I had seen. There was something of that sacredness about it which men feel but do not speak of in friendships. I waited until he had quickly left the room, then I stepped into the hall and, pretending just to be coming from the library, called to him.

All Chinamen are superstitious; or perhaps it should be said that they are wise in the lore that is spurned by the self-sufficient Occidentals.

He did not answer me; that is, he did not come, thinking no doubt that mine was a shadowy voice calling from behind the veil. I snapped my fingers, giving the more physical signal which I sometimes used if I knew that he was near.

He came silently as a ghost himself, incredulous, a bit awestricken.

"Oh, Yang," I said casually, "I just wanted to explain to you about that dummy in there. Come here and I'll show you."

And I did show him, and I did explain in detail. Something that I had not expected to do. But then, I felt myself his debtor.

When I had finished Yang grinned, and I knew that no one would, in safety, steal into the house though he had a key to the front door. I was utterly indifferent as to who fired through the window, or how many times.

V

I SHALL not attempt to describe what happened that evening in its precise sequence. Much happened, and owing to the physical impossibility of being in two places at once—a disadvantage I have often deplored—I am reduced to the necessity of depending on deduction and the description of others in order to give a full narrative of what really took place.

I had sent Jerry on a little mission and on the way back he was to call for Dr. Roberts, and when six o'clock came I was beginning to wonder at the delay.

Vivian came down shortly after six, saying she had planned for us to spend a beautiful, quiet evening together; sarcastically jesting in her offer to play casino, solitaire or anything to entertain me. She knew my weakness for cards. She also knew my weakness for vivid colors, and wore a claret gown that I had not seen before. Her black hair was carefully divided and caught low down on the sides of her pretty head, and great black bosses studded her ears, fragile as shells. Vivian's lips are red, very red even without rouge—which, she says, all women use, including herself.

Her eyes are the darkest of browns, and one gazes futilely into their depths. A king's ransom was on her fingers, another was about her throat as a collar of pearls. It was well that her uncle had gone comfortably to his grave before he knew how she would flagrantly waste the money he had acquired.

Her slender, sinuous arms curved about my neck enticingly, and her uplifted lips plead for the beautiful, quiet evening together.

Of course, I did not plainly decline. I wished that I might definitely accept. And I let her think that I was teasing when I said that I must be about some money matters of my own. Our finances were very comfortably arranged, seeing that she held the larger purse. She was in that enviable position of being able to buy whatever she wanted. So was I for that matter and out of my own purse, for my personal expenses have never been heavy. I do not run to extravagance. But I did have a definite place for a million dollars in gold and currency.

"I wished for two, three—any number of million. And I intended to get it. I had already skimmed the interest and dipped into the principal of my resources and sent it where I intended to pour a million and a half of German gold—that is, into the American Red Cross. Gaboreau had the money. I knew something of Gaboreau. I knew his mania for keeping a detailed record of his enterprises. It was dangerous, and none knew it better than he. But he was careful. I expected at least to find an account of how he had overcome the guard H had about the gold, how the death of each had been devised, and where the treasure was stored. As I have said, I knew Gaboreau's methods.

And not even Vivian at her most lovely could deter me when such game was on foot; but I did not tell her so.

But before that Jerry and Dr. Roberts appeared.

I told the doctor what I thought he

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needed to know, showed him the dummy, and felt something of an artist's pride when he growled:

"Ghastly! Ghastly!"

He promised to play the rôle of physician to the dummy when the "fatal" shot was fired.

The stage was set. It remained to assemble the actors.

I told Vivian of Miss Latour's uncle, and that I had promised to go for him. She wanted to go too, but I would not hear of it. I said that we would be back within an hour or two. We were. But I did not remain at home when I returned.

IT WAS about seven o'clock when I got into the machine and Jerry set out for Fenelon Avenue. He knew the way. He had been out during the afternoon and reported that the Latour house was a stone residence, with cement driveway curved from the street to the door. This arrangement was peculiar, unusual, and had been of comparatively recent construction.

We drove right to the door.

I knocked. After some delay it was opened by a butler, a rather large, dark-faced man, who looked me over with frank suspicion.

"This is the home of Monsieur Latour?" I asked, speaking in French.

He hesitated for an instant and doubtfully admitted that it was.

"I have a message from Monsieur Latour's niece. She has been injured and——"

The man at once became agitated. The girl seemed to be right in the conjecture that her uncle would be greatly concerned over her disappearance, and something of his concern animated the butler.

"What is it, Jacques? What is it? Why don't you answer me? Jacques!" I heard a high-pitched, imperious voice call from within; a voice it was that gave me a very strange sensation.

"Monsieur," Jacques said, turning his back on me and taking a step or two nearer the insistent, fierce-toned person that called, "a gentleman says that he has a message from Mademoiselle Jeanne."

"What? What? Who is he? Show him in. You fool, show him in, I tell you. Did you hear me?"

"Yes, monsieur," Jacques called placatingly. Then to me: "This way, please."

I nodded, hesitated as if about to turn back, then said—

"Oh, will you please speak to my chauffeur and tell him not to wait."

"Certainly, monsieur. Right through the doorway there."

He indicated the doorway I was to enter, then turned rapidly to carry out my request.

I paused a second, made sure that Jacques was going to speak to Jerry, felt of the sagging pocket on each side of my coat, folded my arms and stepped squarely into the doorway.

I was face to face with Antoine Gaboreau.

I HAVE met many men. I will not admit that I was ever fearful of any, but Gaboreau was the one who drew my nerves taut as fine wires of steel keyed to the snapping point. From that moment when it had burst within my head that the invalid uncle of Jeanne Latour was Gaboreau I felt the tenseness that a wizard must feel when mumbling evil charms that will conjure the devil before him.

I had stood face to face with Gaboreau and escaped as much by good luck as by caution from the diabolical contraptions with which he hedged himself about. To confront him is an experience that one does not forget. That bald head and thin, hooked nose, upturned chin, and those deep bright black eyes, stony as a serpent's and as unwinking, were seared so vividly on my memory that I often found them haunting my dreams.

He was terrible. Seldom may any man be called terrible, but the cunning of Gaboreau was satanic, his cruelty unspeakable.

The truth is that Gaboreau was a maniac, a maniac physically helpless but with a brain powerful as that of genius; and the whole driving-power of that maniacal brain was directed toward crime. He was contemptuous of the police, and he held within those fragile hands a criminal organization that struck right and left with amazing daring. All members, all the police, knew the name Gaboreau. Fewer had ever seen him; fewer still knew from what citadel he kept his watch and sent his implacable orders.

Because he knew that he was dealing with, employing, desperate men, and feared

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that even those high in his confidence, whom he must meet from time to time, might any hour strike at him and undertake to usurp his name and authority, he devised ingenious traps with which to forestall any man the moment it should be disclosed that he was an assassin or dangerous. I may mention that on the previous occasion when I had come into his presence he gave me a book with poison on the pages, saying that it was his diary. The pages stuck. I moistened my finger and narrowly missed conveying the crystals to my mouth.

A heavy lead weight dropped from the ceiling on to a chair when, suspicious of his urgency that I should sit in it, I dropped a heavy book on to the seat. He told me frankly that these contraptions were for his "friends," his lieutenants, his captains. He never expected that any one else could discover his hiding-places. I had located him through a telephone; and I was to learn that though he now had a telephone in the house it was a private line connected with a room more than a mile away from which messages were relayed.

It is said that every strong man has his weakness. With some it is women, with some it is money. The only weakness I knew Gaboreau to have was the fear of firearms. He did not object to the roar, and he could be calm when they were leveled at him. But he would not fire a gun himself. That must have been the result of some queer "complex" connected with his war experiences, for certainly a French colonel would have known the use of those weapons. But he would not touch a gun: it was to him as a snake is to some people; but he knew and used almost every other conceivable instrument of death.

Gaboreau held his organization and maintained his authority for the three reasons that from time immemorial have been observed by great crime chiefs. First: he was a master at showing duller-witted fellows—and anybody was duller-witted than he—how to carry out daring plans successfully. Next: he was prodigally generous. Money meant little or nothing to him personally. He enjoyed success; he made of crime a fine art, and it took money to operate. And all who served him knew that they were extravagantly rewarded. Lastly: all who failed to serve him faithfully knew that torture and death would hit them unerringly.

All great criminals, all who operate in defiance of the police, observe much the same kind of organization, just as the armies of all nations are organized much alike. The identity of the chief must be veiled, concealed, for if he becomes a conspicuous mark he is sure to fall quickly, and the organization goes to pieces. Some are bolder than others, some operate on a larger scale. That is the only difference.

I did not give Gaboreau credit for a single tender, human, emotion. I believed the story of Jeanne Latour. She was a gentlewoman; and while I felt that his hatred of Germans might react in a certain solicitude for her, I believed that he would sacrifice her as quickly as he would any girl of the streets to further his relentless ends.

I could have called the police to help me out. Perhaps a certain inspector would have jumped at the chance. But what could really have been proved on Gaboreau? Nothing. He kept a diary, he kept newspaper clippings, but the diary might have been defended as fiction, and it is the frailest of evidence to convict a man of having committed the crimes whose accounts he clips from newspapers and files in a case. Who would have testified against him? No man under heaven whose word would have been worth the ink wasted by the court reporter in taking it down.

Nothing that I knew, for instance, would have been enterable as testimony. The law is a game, and Gaboreau was so consummate a master that he scorned the players that society pays to play in its interest. It is notorious that many men in finance do that. Gaboreau was the only man in crime that I have ever known who did it so completely.

I could have killed him. True enough. I have never shot at any man except in self-defense, or when I knew that I was avenging a friend. Oddly enough Gaboreau had never struck at a friend of mine—that is, with a death weapon. He had promised me a quick ending of life, so I had reason, perhaps, for doing the obvious thing to keep him from fulfilling his promise. He had tried to catch me in his contraptions, but there is a difference which I can not explain, and which those who can not understand without an explanation would not understand at all, between shooting an

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armed man down and shooting one who hands a poisoned book to be thumbed with moistened fingers.

Besides, Gaboreau was a cripple, a pathetic figure with that broad forehead and intellectual head set on a withered neck. The lower part of his face was demoniac. His chest was thin, his arms mere stems of bone, his legs paralyzed. Cold-blooded as I have been called, and perhaps am, I could not murder a creature so physically helpless.

AS I stood just inside the doorway I had no time to notice the room, to look about me. My eyes were on his. The impact of gaze on gaze held for seconds, perhaps minutes. A glare of fire seemed to shoot, as from the eyes of a basilisk out of those small, deep, black holes under his brow.

He sat in a swivel chair drawn close to a great, flat, mahogany desk from which I had an impression without directly looking at them, of scattered maps and papers and ornamental paper-weights. A light shawl had evidently been on his shoulders, and had fallen back on the chair. The room was large, very large, and at one end a four-foot fireplace cast warmth from a bright bed of wood coals. But of course I did not notice this until afterward.

Gaboreau looked into my eyes until it seemed that his gaze had gimleted through to the back of my skull, then leaning slightly forward he searched from top to toes, and smiling settled back in his chair and began to chuckle softly, again fastening his eyes on my face.

I said nothing. I made no move.

For some time he looked at me, having recovered from his surprise, and appearing to be quite amused, chuckled and grinned with that toothless mouth.

Inch by inch, scarcely moving a muscle except gently to ease the weight from first one foot and then the other, I came closer and closer to the desk; and I was almost within reaching distance of it before he noticed. Then sitting up stiffly he cried out in a shrill, ferocious voice:

"Go back! Go back! Don't come near me."

For an answer I boldly stepped forward and stood against the desk. I could now easily reach across and grip his hands.

He settled back in his chair and stared at me steadily for a moment, then said—

"Everhard, you don't know how close you are to death."

I gave no answer. I knew that he, man that he was, had been almost shattered by my entrance, not because I am who I am so much as by his discovery that it was known that the respectable Monsieur Latour of Fenelon Avenue was none other than Antoine Gaboreau. At the very least it would mean his scrambling for new quarters, the throwing of his organization out of key for a time.

"All right. All right, Mummy," he exclaimed suddenly, again leaning forward. "Where is my niece?"

"At my home."

At that he thrust his head a bit forward, appraising the truth of my statement.

"Holding her as hostage? Won't do you a —— bit of good. You're a dead man, Everhard. Dead. But I want you to live long enough to tell me how you discovered me. How did you?"

"Dead men tell no tales."

Gaboreau's gargoyle face was lighted for an instant in amusement. The answer, though denying his request, seemed to please him.

"Do you know I've searched this city over for her? I've had people killed on the suspicion that they killed her. I never thought of you. And, —— you, I think of you enough!"

"You have been on my mind a little of late, too. I think that I have received all of your messages."

Again he almost laughed in amusement.

"What'd you find from the messenger boy? Didn't track the source far, did you?"

"I asked nothing of the messengers."

"What!"

"No. I knew it would be useless."

"Everhard," he said almost plaintively, "you spoil my fun." Then quickly: "How'd you catch my niece?"

"I did not catch her at all."

"Go on, man. Go on. Talk. —— it, talk. Go on," he cried, flaring up in excitement, his thin hands fluttering before him.

"I found her in men's clothes, on the street, knifed, unconscious. I took her home. She had been out of her head for some time. As soon as she told me that she must see her uncle, and gave me his address, I came to notify him and found you!"

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He lurched forward as though about to leap from his chair on to the table, and beat the top—three inches thick—with his puny fist as though to smash it, crying:

"You lie, —— you, Everhard, you lie! You knew who I was before you stepped through that door. She did not tell you. She never heard of me—only of her uncle Latour!

"Now you listen to me," he screamed furiously, gleams wicked as flame shooting from his eyes, "you think I have tried to kill you and that you have baffled me. Bah! You fool! I liked you, Everhard. I played with you. I could have got you any hour of the day or night. But you have nerve—and most men are cowards. You came near getting me once and I swore to cut your heart out and stuff it down your throat. I am speaking truth now. I am speaking truth.

"I was furious. But when I thought it over I saw that you were the first man that ever fought back instead of running to the police and whining out a beggary for their help. And you —— near got me! I'd have given a million dollars for you, Everhard. Yes, a million cash. I have to show these petty larcenists that hang on to my coat-tails how they escape the police before they will budge. You are different. But you can't beat me!

"I am going to your house myself; if my niece is there I will bring her back and for every lie you have told I will cut a pound of flesh from your living body. And if she is not there I will roast you alive in that fire," and his thin hand swept toward the huge fireplace.

He stopped, breathless, trembling, apoplectic; but of one thing I was sure: he had meant every word of his hideous threat. He was an insane man, a herculean maniac imprisoned within a withered body.

"Yes. I came to take you," I said much more quietly than I felt.

"Came to take me! Take me? You fool. You have been covered with a sawed-off shotgun every second you have been in this room! You are covered now. If I tap that paper-weight with these scissors—" he picked up and held the point of the scissors perilously near the metallic weight —"you will be instantly shot! And Jacques can't miss."

"Who?" I asked.

I was really interested if I had heard aright. Much depended on that.

"Jacques, Jacques who opened the door. He didn't bring you in here, did he? He showed you the way, then slipped through a side paneling and has been standing on guard. I can take no chances with strangers—no," he added as a sardonic and weary afterthought, "nor friends. That is why I laughed when I saw that it was really you! And you tried to catch me in my own house!"

He laughed frantically, hysterically.

"I am afraid," I said slowly, gaining his tense attention by the deliberate way I dropped each word, "that Jacques has disappointed you this time."

"What's that?" It was a furious scream that came at me, as he brandished the scissors menacingly.

"If I am not mistaken Jacques is sitting out in my machine with the mouth of an automatic snuggling up against his ribs. I asked him to speak to my chauffeur and waited just long enough to see that he did."

"You lie!" Gaboreau screamed, and bending over the desk he brought the scissors down fiercely against the gong-topped paper-weight and the ring of it reverberated tremulously though the big room in the expectant silence.

Gaboreau sat tense and nerves braced for the terrific roar of the shotgun at close quarters, and my sluggish heart stepped up rapidly as the continued silence told that Jerry had fully carried out instructions.

I had known far too much to allow any door-opener of Gaboreau's to remain at my back.

Other servants might be in the house, but knowing Gaboreau's aversion to having any one around him who knew his identity, I was confident that they would be only servants. Moreover, I knew that he employed only deaf servants—or at least those are all he had had in the past. But the man who opened the door would have to be a confidant, to admit those wanted, to fend off the suspected.

SECOND after second died away, then Gaboreau flung himself backward in his chair and cursed me, his voice rising and rising until it became a shriek and flecks of foam gathered on his lips. I did not interrupt him, or try to explain. He was frantic with rage—or

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seemed to be—yet all the while I had an impression that there was method in his madness.

It came on me very strongly that he was acting, not because his acting was in any way flawed, for it was not, and, moreover, I knew that this temptestuous old Lucifer was putting his heart and soul into his curses. But I was somewhat experienced in the ways of the world, and in the ways of Gaboreau. Why should he be warning me, putting me on my guard, doing his best to terrify me, seemingly controverting his own purposes in telling me such things as would make me watchful, except for one reason: to hold my attention? Not even flattery holds a man's attention so closely as curses.

It may have been something psychic, for in moments of extreme peril men are often made aware of unknown menaces by a faculty called "premonition"; or it may have been the smooth rasping sound that must have reached my ears drew my attention from Gaboreau's face, and I glanced down.

Less than eight feet away, its huge body curved on the deep, thick carpet, with head drawn back over almost one-third of its length ready to strike and enfold me in its massive coils lay a snake, a constrictor, a python, some thirty feet long. It had come from clear across the room because its trail was marked in the nap of the carpet across which its heavy body had moved.

I jumped back, shooting from both hands as I went, hitting that monster squarely in the head and neck even as it struck with a lightning-like thrust. The impact of my bullets deflected its aim. I had never shot more rapidly, I have never shot more accurately. My body felt as though it had been turned to ice. In three seconds I had emptied both guns. I dropped one to the floor, pressed the clip of the other loose and jammed another home, then leaped through the doorway, keeping, so to speak, nothing more than my eyebrows exposed.

Gaboreau's chair was empty. He was nowhere to be seen. The monster had the room to himself, and it seemed too small. There was no doubt that it was mortally wounded, as wounded as a snake could be; but the death-flurry was terrific. That sinuous ton of muscle lashed and writhed and smashed convulsively. An upward sweep of its tail brought down the chandelier with a crashing of glass and plaster, leaving the room dimmed, unlighted except for the bright glow from the fireplace and light that streamed through the wide doorway from the hall.

The pounding body tore the carpet as if it were silk under a flail; a chair was shattered, a pedestal overturned, and when that lashing length came against the wall the house trembled as though about to fall, while pictures clattered to the floor. For a time the python would coil around itself, fold on fold slipping rapidly through the tangled mass; then suddenly heave in a fury, bending and whirling so rapidly the eye could scarcely follow, striking with powerful impact.

The snake was dead. I knew that. It was dead as a chicken with a chopped neck, but as a chicken will flounce about the yard, leaping and pounding, so the muscular reaction of this monster wrecked the room and smashed, or in some way broke everything with which it came in contact excepting the massive desk, solid as the tree from which the solid top was hewn.

I don't know how long it was before the python settled down to quiet writhings and weak contortions. I only know that as I started to step into the room it gave another whirl, and with incredible swiftness the huge body launched in my direction. It was launched blindly, of course; and I got back into the hallway, shameless in my haste. Something like twenty minutes at least must have elapsed before I ventured in, and I had no wish to linger, for though the snake was not motionless it was harmless, but the horrible reptilian odor nauseated me.

But I was intent on discovering where Gaboreau had gone and how. The large, solid table sat near the wall at the extreme right of the room, and the only door other than that leading into the hall that I could find was clear across and near the fireplace.

Gaboreau could not stand. He could only crawl, and not rapidly as he must drag his useless legs over the floor. He could not possibly have reached the hallway door before I did, for I had made swift use of both my legs in getting there and had been nearer the door than he to start with. He could not have crept across the floor to the other door without my having seen him because he could have been pretty much in my line of vision as I peered into

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the room at the snake in its death-agony. Moreover, such a slow journey—or a more rapid one—as he would have been compelled to make would have been hazardous. There was scarcely a square foot of the floor that the python had not flailed.

Perhaps there was a secret paneling somewhere near the wall. I pulled my electric torch and examined the walls carefully, drawing the blade of a knife along the wall-paper and scratching it, but I did not find a trace of a crack or paneling; and the most ingeniously contrived paneling entrance must disclose its secret if, as I did, one ruins the wall-paper.

I did find an aperture, very skilfully concealed by means of a filigree frame, through which Jacques with his sawed-off shotgun had been expected to stand guard. But I could not find a hole through which Gaboreau could have disappeared; and it did not make me comfortable to remain in his house with him out of sight.

Yet I had no wish to leave it without him, and I pried about for trap-doors, panels, and hiding-places. I discovered the haunt of the snake, the cage or rather house from which it had slipped when its door dropped. I took long enough to find out how Gaboreau had been able to make that great monster leave with a degree of promptness, and found that a wire, carefully laid, connected the cage door with Gaboreau's desk. He had had nothing to do but press a button.

Peering into the cage I was surprised to see a fine spray of water playing from tiny holes in the ridge-pole that upheld the roof of glass. This cage was outside the house, and must have appeared to be a small forcing house with its glass top, but there was an opening, or door, right through the wall of the room into the cage.

Undoubtedly the mechanism that dropped this door at a pressure from the button in the desk also released the sprinkler; and the python, not being amphibian like its brother the anaconda, was immediately aroused to find an escape. No doubt too the monster was kept hungry. A python will, reluctantly it is true, go for months without food and lose none of its strength by the fast—but made all the more eager for food.

It was a diabolical and truly Gaboreauan conception. A thirty-foot python can swallow a man as easily as a black snake downs a rat: the victim would disappear, be entombed, literally swallowed up, and never sign or trace of him be discoverable after a few hours; while the monster, gorged, would be sluggish and harmless. If the room were locked, and a few rabbits loosened in its cage it would soon crawl back of its own will, having done no damage and left no trace other than the track on the carpet which a vacuum-sweeper would quickly efface.

Jacques with the sawed-off shotgun was one, and the python another of the contraptions and devices that Gaboreau kept for faithless friends. The snake was slower, not effective against a violent man bent on assassination and there Jacques would have been the preventative; but it was the more horrible, and no man, once that monster was in the room, could have escaped other than the way I did. Flight would have been as futile as to sprint on a desert from a lioness; and Gaboreau had no reason to believe that any man could shoot so rapidly and straight as I.

But where had he got to himself? Minutes were flying and it was perilous to have him out of sight for an instant.

I CALLED my wits together and tried to be reasonable. There were no secret panels that he could have reached. He could not possibly have made either of the doors. Naturally he had not been under any illusion as to the danger of remaining in sight with that hungry monster in the room, and so had prepared himself a hiding-place. There was only one place that he could have gone, and it had not seemed to me large enough for a man. But his was a small withered body: so I went around to the front of the desk and hauled at the deep drawer which set from the top of the table to the floor.

I saw that it was really one drawer though it had three handles arranged in such a way as to give the impression of three drawers. No man, other than a Tom Thumb could have concealed himself in one of those if there had been three.

The drawer refused to budge. I set my weight against it, but that desk was solidly built throughout.

I rapped on it with the butt of the automatic and, feeling almost as though I were being silly to threaten a drawer that might be filled with nothing more

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formidable than scrap-books, shouted—

"Open this—open, or I'll shoot—shoot into it!"

The door slid open and Gaboreau, flat on his back, with his withered legs pulled shapelessly forward on his body, came into view. He had pressed some cunning mechanism that operated in opening and closing the hiding-place.

He blinked up at me with more frank amazement than when he had first seen me come through the doorway.

"Help me out! Help me out!" he said crossly, petulantly, as though he had not loosened a monster on to me, but had fallen himself into a tight fix and I was ungallant not to give aid.

"You go to the devil," I replied, with visions of poisoned needles, or at least pointed finger-nails scratching at my eyes, if I should stoop over him.

"Is it dead?" he asked abruptly, making no effort to twist himself out.

"Yes."

"Just as well," he said, squirming about and beginning to haul himself up. "I was afraid of that thing. Didn't want it to get you, Everhard. It wouldn't have hurt you anyway. I'd have whistled to it."

I can not possibly convey the incredible plausibility with which Gaboreau spoke. He lied deep down in his throat and I knew it; but such was the uncanny power of the man that I actually felt the impulse, in spite of the hideous experience, to believe him. I did not believe him. I did not come anywhere near believing him. But I do not doubt that an innocent third party, stepping into the room at the time, might have done so.

"You might as well have whistled at a thunderbolt," I said.

"No, no. Beelzebub was well trained. Your guns excited him. I was just ready to whistle when you shot. But I was awfully afraid of him myself. I sat at this desk in hourly terror that I would accidentally press the button that released his door and he could come upon me—before I had a chance to whistle!"

I laughed. He had added the whistle as a hasty afterthought, and he had the consummate nerve to grin friendlily at me as I laughed.

Gaboreau climbed out and into his chair, but not until I had run my hands over his pockets. He had no weapons.

"Well, Everhard," he began, "now you can have your choice. Be my man or get yourself killed. You have brains and courage. True, I tried to catch you, first with Jacques and then with Beelzebub. The man that's easily trapped is no earthly use to me. I am willing to be friends. Just because I try to kill a man doesn't mean that I have a thing in the world against him. It may only mean that he has got in my way. I want you. I'll have you. By God, I will. Name your price! Name it! Money, women or power. Name it!"

I replied slowly.

"When I get through looking over your papers I think I'll know where to put my hands on a million or so; and as for women, I have one of infinite variety who has more varying personalities than are to be found in a harem; and I never care for more power than will enable me to meet any man face to face, whether we stand in friendship or in anger."

All of my reply excepting that touching the "million or so" was lost on him. He stared at me with that curious, intent, boring way that seems trying, and not wholly failing, to read hidden thoughts at the back of one's head.

A long silence came between us.

When Gaboreau spoke it showed that his quick mind had put more than two and two together. He had made quite an addition, or rather, deduction, for he said more ominously than anything I had ever before heard—

"Everhard, if you know von Hartmann, you had better shoot me now!"

I still had the automatic in my hand, though I had not been threatening him with it. For one thing, I do not need to keep those people covered who have seen me get a gun into action. Gaboreau sat at his desk, though the papers had been scattered about, and in the lashing of its body the python had scattered many which were folded, and torn and crumpled maps were all about the floor. But to those Gaboreau had given no attention. He gave attention to nothing but my face as if to read there my thoughts.

He had made a blind guess that because I knew of the stolen million, German spies had told me, perhaps engaged me, to face him. The spy chief then must be von Hartmann.

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I knew by the way Gaboreau spoke that it was no idle threat. For one thing the man was insane, and for another I remembered how he had mined the other house wherein I had located him so that he could destroy it and all in it by merely pressing a button. I did not doubt for a minute that some such arrangement as that was here. But it was not fear that made me give the answer that I did. It was not an answer given in words.

No. He had said significantly that I had better shoot him if I knew von Hartmann: and for an answer I threw my guns to the floor, standing for the first time in many, many years, utterly unarmed.

I folded my arms and looked down at him.

Gaboreau was inexplicable, and very nearly irresistible. The man was fascinating, hideous in appearance, entirely terrible in character, yet so amazingly dynamic and volatile that, like Satanus himself, he attracted even as he repelled. And even then he did an amazing thing. After studying my face for a few seconds, understanding fully what I had done and why, he ostentatiously removed a ring from the third finger of his right hand and then held that hand out to me.

I took it.

Without a word being spoken we had pledged a mutual hatred for von Hartmann who, I was soon to learn, was, as I suspected, the redoubtable H. For my part, however, in that handclasp there was no truce between Gaboreau and myself. Not much. I would have welcomed his powerful assistance but I would not compromise myself. He had tried before to make of me one of his lieutenants, and though in a way that was a flattering offer, yet my honor is a thing peculiar, but mine own and I live up to it.

"Everhard," he asked, carefully fingering the ring he had removed, "how did you learn of that money?"

I sketched for him the entire history of my exploits from the time I had caught his fainting niece on the street.

He chuckled in enjoyment. His eyes fairly danced. He said many things complimentary to me, and I believe that he meant most of what he said.

"Will you accept a present from me?" he asked.

"If it binds me to no course of action."

"You mean——"

The brightness died from his eyes, and they became again sinister, dubious.

"That you and I, Monsieur Gaboreau, can never be anything but enemies."

He laughed outright.

"Here," he said, holding the ring gingerly and extending it toward me, "take this. Wear it. And when you would be rid of an enemy, shake hands with him. Turn the facet in. The tiniest of needles is there. And you thought me helpless! If I had struck out and scratched you, you would have been dead in ten hours. Everhard, I grabbed more than a million of German gold—not gold, but good United States currency and gold—out of German pockets. Say the word and I will divide it dollar for dollar with you and we'll drink to the Kaiser's death out of two chapeaux of the Death's Head Hussars!"

"No," I said. "Put that ring in a box or something and I'll accept it. But the money—I have a place for every dollar of it."

"You want me to pay you a million?" he asked, honestly surprised.

"No. I expect to take it—all. I can be frank, Monsieur Gaboreau, for you are going to my home to visit your niece. She loves you. To her you are a kind, noble man. I expect to keep you there as long as she remains, and I shall expect her to remain until fully recovered. I expect to return and ransack your papers—don't edge so close to the desk—" and I stepped closer to him—"and locate the part in your diary—you faithfully keep one, I know—that speaks of the German money. Then I shall take it all, and dispose of it as I see fit.

"Don't look so black and threatening, and kindly put that ring down. You must know that I can not be scratched after being warned. And you can not call for your servants to keep me from carrying you away. Servants in a house trained not to be attracted by the report of a shotgun, who do not come when a fusilade from automatics rings or when a python in a death-flurry nearly tears the house down, are not to be attracted by screams."

"They are deaf—stone deaf," he said simply.

I had supposed so, remembering that other house servants whom he had had were deaf.

"You will go with me, then?"

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He agreed so quickly, apparently so willingly, that I was suspicious.

"Now what deviltry are you up to?" I asked bluntly.

He laughed. He enjoyed it.

"Nothing, Everhard. My game is over. You win. I would have to leave this house anyway. I know von Hartmann will find out sooner or later where I am. And I had Beelzebub waiting for him. Also Jacques trained for him. Also this——"

AND as close as I was to that demoniac and apparently helpless man, before I could snatch his arm back he had thrust forward, plucked a long knife from a concealed sheath underneath the edge of the table and whirling from his chair to the floor he was out of my reach and threatening to hurl it at me.

I could have jumped at him but he could have thrown it. I was not near either of the guns on the floor for I had flung them hard by way of emphasizing my reply to the suggestion that I was allied with spies. In other words, I was harmless, and he was armed. I did not think a knife hurled from his hand would be fatal, but it would be dangerous. It might be poisoned.

"Everhard," he said without a trace of anger, speaking in a shrill, but matter-of-fact voice, "you are a —— fool. When you came in here I wanted to kill you and have you out of the way because I was busy with von Hartmann. I did not have time to be bothered with a dunce who thinks it is a brave, heroic thing to meet Gaboreau alone in his den. You were annoying. I am after that —— German. I am going to cut his heart out and send it to the Kaiser. But when I found you had started to buck the German gang I respected you, and was ready to help you.

"But you—you will have nothing to do with Gaboreau. He is a bold, bad man. He eats toasted babies for breakfast. You have personal courage, Everhard, but no brains. You can't fight von Hartmann. He is just as brave as you are and has brains. It is no credit to be brave. You want that money I took from the Germans. Stupid Dutchmen! I had their beer doped, then carted them off like so many sacks of flour and I killed them, Everhard. I killed them one by one. It wasn't murder. It is war! Not," he added contemptuously, "that I care anything about murdering Germans. I don't. Nor anybody else that gets in my way.

"You want that money. Like all fools, you are fascinated by a million. Bah! You couldn't find it in a hundred years. My diary—bah! I write my diary every morning and burn it every night. You taught me a lesson once before.

"Now I am going with you to your home. But I am going of my own will. I am going in my own machine, and in my own wheel-chair. And when I get ready to leave your house I will leave. Hear me? But I won't go if you don't want me. And I warn you in advance that it will be dangerous. Von Hartmann has got on to me. When Jeanne was lost I nearly lost my head and I have been in and out more in the last three days than in three months before. He has found some of my traitors—yes, I made sure that he would.

"But until you came I was safe in this house, and I waited for him. I knew he would come. Let him come! I was ready. He couldn't find that money in years—not in centuries," and he laughed in amusement.

One of the curious things about Gaboreau was that I found him a most bewildering liar. He mingled truth and falsehood in the same phrases and though garrulous he was really secretive, so that one scarcely knew which was which. Personally I did not believe that he would have remained in the house twenty minutes if he thought there was a chance of von Hartmann knowing it was his residence; but one could never tell about him. Nor could I understand his offer to go with me. Many things I could not understand.

I studied very hard, and as I lay my hands on the back of the chair out of which he flung himself, I thought over what he had said and tried to reason what it could mean. I concluded that he must have two or three, or maybe more, though I doubted it, for Gaboreau did not work his men in herds, but preferred to depend on one or two faithful, cunning men, in the neighborhood; and these must be on the watch with instructions to follow his car whenever it went out.

That would somewhat account for his insistence in declaring that he would go in his own machine. If that were followed to my home then he would have some reason for expecting to be able to have help in leaving whenever he was ready.

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I did not intend that anything of the kind should happen.

He was on the floor leaning on his left arm while the knife was poised in the right to throw. There was little chance I had of dodging if he were an expert with the knife, as he probably was, for it does not require much practise to acquire dexterity and he had long, lonely hours in which to practise.

I looked at my watch. It was growing late. Something past nine o'clock.

As I looked at the watch I unfastened the clasp and when I started to replace it in my pocket the watch slipped and dropped to the floor. I stooped to get it and — I gathered that swivel chair into my arms, crouched slightly, and holding it as a barrier, lifted it from the floor. He had little chance of striking me through the chair, at least anywhere except the legs or arms, while if I fell forward, bearing the chair down on him he would be crushed.

"Throw that knife away!" I said.

He did. It sang past my ears, and in an instant he was scrambling for the doorway leading into the hall.

I don't remember, but I expect for one of the few times in my life I swore a good, round oath. His agility, resourcefulness, energy and cunning was almost unbelievable. I slammed the chair to the floor and bounded after him.

I caught him, and though he screamed and clawed frantically, I swung him from the floor into my arms. He was light and not strong—was really pathetically weak for so terrible a spirit. I held him tightly, clamping both his arms against his body with one of my arms as if he were a child, and turned a deaf ear to his raving. I picked up both my guns and promised myself never again to be such a fool as to be without them.

But Gaboreau had apparently misunderstood when I threw the gun away: he thought I had entered an alliance with him against the von Hartmann crowd, and I was disillusioning him.

I was determined to have him out of the house in a hurry, and so very much against his will I carried him out, clapping a hand over his mouth to shut off the clamor he was making.

Jerry was at the steering-wheel with motor running, and Jacques with hands tied and feet tied sat beside him. I had told Jerry to be ready to make a dash for it if any one left the house before I did, but otherwise not to become excited if he chanced to overhear a little commotion.

"Heavens, but it's glad I am t' see you," he said frankly. "Thought somebody had a machine gun in there an' was pullin' the house down."

"Monsieur Gaboreau gave me an interesting reception, Jerry. Now drive fast for we have something more to do this evening."

"Fast's the word; sir. But there's been people snoopin' around here, Mr. Everhard. Maybe my 'magination, but I've seen the same car drive back and forth a half-dozen times."

"Well, go on, and I'll watch to see that we are not followed. Jacques can ride all right up there? That's good. We will be quite comfortable in here."

I had brought the limousine, trusting to the darkness to conceal the bullet-marks put into it by the policeman a night or two before.

JERRY drove rapidly and I kept a lookout behind, but no one seemed to be following, so I had him make a bee-line for home.

I suggested to Gaboreau that he make the best of a bad situation, but he only sat silent and stared relentlessly at me, disdaining to make an answer; so with nothing to distract my attention I gave myself over to wondering what I should do with him.

If I turned him over to the police he would certainly escape conviction if he did not escape their locks and bars. All things considered, I returned favorably to an idea I had had in my head from the time I planned to bring him to my house. I was not without friends among certain persons of political importance, and I did not doubt that if I told them the whole story they would be willing to use their influence to have Gaboreau secretly stowed away in an asylum for the remainder of his life. That was where he belonged.

If I could get my hands on that German spy fund I could deduct enough to provide for Jeanne Latour and have something left over to pay for my trouble. There might be some difficulty in persuading her that her uncle was insane, but not if it could be arranged for her to eavesdrop while he and I were holding a little conversation.

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I knew that when he was aroused and angry he would say such things as would horrify her and make her convinced that a comfortable asylum was the best place for him.

I wanted Gaboreau out of the way. If he had been anything but a cripple I would not have had any scruples against using other than gentle methods to do it. If he were quietly slipped into an asylum no one of his gang would know where he was and therefore could not give aid.

I had ordered the dummy and planned to use it as my corpse before I knew there was a chance of my getting my hands on him; but I deduced that, with the evidence of Vivian and George to tell of the messages he had sent, with the shattered statue to illustrate his method, Gaboreau, thinking I had actually been shot, would be willing to retire to an asylum rather than face a murder charge even with the chance of acquittal.

Above all things he seemed to dislike publicity. Originally the dummy had been intended merely to make him think I was dead, and so forget me; also to deceive H. But the situation having changed radically, I had figured out this other use to which I might put it, and had been exceedingly particular because I knew there were no keener eyes in the world than his own.

When we arrived at the house, as I was in haste to leave again, I had George take Jacques to the basement and lock him up with Condon and Gregory. Jerry carried Gaboreau up the stairs to his niece and his instructions were to wait outside of the door until he received further orders.

Vivian had gone to her room, angry at having been flouted and worried that I might get into trouble. Women have remarkable complexities. Perhaps I should have explained to her. But just then I was in haste, and I had got out the roadster and was ready to be off when George stopped me to say that Henshaw had telephoned several times, seemingly frantic to get me, but would not give his message to any one else and had declared that he could not leave his number. He had, however, on the last call, said to tell Mr. Everhard to watch out and stay indoors.

That was too vague to interest me, and I started off.

WHEN Jerry, who was a man of goodly proportion, almost as large as George, but lacking George's unusual agility and strength, had carried Gaboreau up-stairs and helped him into his niece's room, he withdrew into the hallway and put an ear to the keyhole. But he did not hear much. In fact, he barely got his head out of the way before the nurse came out, having been peremptorily dismissed by Gaboreau, who was not in the most amiable of moods. And Jerry couldn't have understood anyway, as they would have certainly talked in French.

With Mrs. Morrison standing sulkily in the hall not ten feet from the door, Jerry was in a poor situation for an aspirant eavesdropper; but though he heard nothing I had an account of the meeting between Gaboreau and his niece from her lips later.

They were together for some time, though Rob attempted to interrupt them; and was inclined to be all the more insistent because Jerry, either knowing what he was about or surmising that Rob would be piqued, did not say that the girl was talking with her uncle, but with a "man." And Jerry was able to pass an enjoyable half-hour while Rob corkscrewed a description of the "man" from him.

Inside of the room, however, there was no trace of comedy.

Jeanne Latour came to America after the butchery of her parents and stopped some weeks with Gaboreau in the house at Fenelon Avenue. It must have been a trying time for him because he had the girl incessantly repeating stories of Hun atrocities, and never failed to fly into a terrible passion. And too, she, noticing his queer household, the deaf servants and all, was after him continually to change his manner of living.

So with a characteristic mixture of truth and lies he explained that he was doing what he could to locate von Hartmann; that he did not dare offer his information to the police because it was too vague for one thing, and for another there was too great a chance of some friendly German-American being in the police and warning von Hartmann, so he, Latour, was obliged to keep in the background and hire men to do his hunting for him. His effort was directed toward locating von Hartmann. He knew his name, knew his manner of working, knew many of his agents—and

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with usual promptness took measures to end their usefulness—but he had been unable to get his hands on the chief terrorist himself.

One day Jeanne came upon her uncle when he was in a fury.

"Oh, for a man that I could trust!" he cried. "Why weren't you born a man instead of a female?" he screamed at her, wholly beside himself in rage over some bungle of an agent.

Jeanne was shocked and terrified at first because Gaboreau—Latour as she knew him—had always treated her with affection. But she was a resolute maiden, and moreover felt very much of a man's desire to play a part in running to earth the gang of that emperor whose butchers had put her own parents to death, razed her native town, and trampled under foot her beloved France.

Without replying, she went to her room and clipped her hair, tore off her dress and putting on a dressing-gown went to her astonished uncle and said—

"Get me the clothes and I will do a man's work!"

Gaboreau appeared to be, and perhaps was, delighted. But such a master of detail as he knew that it would take long practise before a girl, even with shorn hair, and in pantaloons, could masquerade as a man. The clothes were procured and she was drilled the biggest part of every day in playing a young man's part.

He drilled her until, when something was thrown toward her she would actually draw her knees together to make a lap instead of instinctively spreading them as is the universal practise among women. But the most difficult part was to acquire a deepened voice, and hour after hour she would talk, unnaturally forcing the voice until she could with ease converse and not reveal the soft, sweet tones recognizable as a girl's.

When a degree that seemed close to perfection in her rôle had been attained she was sent to live at the Kingston Apartments, the rooms being already engaged for her. They were numbered 5B, and a door was between them and 5A, a large double door, which could be thrown open in case parties wished for a double apartment. But Jeanne did not go there as a man.

She went as a girl and wore a wig. Her instructions were clear.

She was to meet if possible one Leonore Musset, who had the adjoining apartment, and cultivate her acquaintance, but, moreover, she was to listen to every word that was said in Miss Musset's apartment, which, much of the time, was shared by a blustering fellow whose name she learned was Bill long before she found out that it was Bill Condon. His relations with Miss Musset were not always the most amiable though they seemed quite intimate.

It was by means of quarrels between those two that she overheard reference to H, and eventually associated H with von Hartmann.

Peculiar as it may seem, and it did seem peculiar to Jeanne, Gaboreau did not let her know how to reach him by telephone. He often telephoned to her, but no matter how anxious she might be to reach him, a messenger to the house was the quickest, and even this method was discouraged.

Gaboreau at last by pulling some one of his innumerable wires succeeded in arranging an introduction between Jeanne and Leonore Musset; whereupon Jeanne elaborated the acquaintance and took occasion to talk a great deal about her brother, who, oddly enough, was a twin.

"A fine-looking boy he must be," was Miss Musset's compliment. "I would like to meet him."

Jeanne explained that he was expected in the city soon. She also took the opportunity to say that though both of them were born in France, her brother was even more pro-German than she.

Miss Musset received this with surprise and interest, and even confided that though she was born of French parents, but not in France, she was decidedly pro-German.

A few days later a young man knocked at Apartment 5A, and when Miss Musset, chancing to be alone at the time, answered the door, the young man seemed surprised and asked after his sister.

Miss Musset guessed his identity at once, and with many smiles and sly droopings of eyelids, explained how he had come to make the mistake. Quite strangely it chanced that the "sister" was not in, and Miss Musset invited the young man into her own apartment to await her return. In the course of an hour they were very well acquainted, but the "sister" had not returned, so the young man, unable to wait longer, wrote a note and left.

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When the sister came in along toward evening Miss Musset presented her with the note, and told what an adorable fellow the brother was.

IT TAXED Jeanne's ingenuity to invent excuses which kept Miss Musset from wondering why she never met sister and brother at the same time. Perhaps that was the point that aroused somebody's suspicion; for, to Jeanne's intense delight, after there had been much pro-German talk between them, Miss Musset unexpectedly said late one night:

"If your brother will go to 493 Clinker Alley between 12 and 1 this very night he will meet a party who can give him work in the German cause, and good pay too!"

An odd stipulation was, however, that the brother should follow a certain route which, among other things, required that he walk for several blocks longer than would have been needed had he ridden as far as was convenient on the car.

Though Gaboreau had warned Jeanne over and over not to go anywhere other than to the shopping district without letting him know—undoubtedly he wished to have her shadowed and protected, for he well knew the type of men he was up against—she saw that she could not notify him in time to keep the appointment, and she recklessly went her way without even attempting to send a message. With the result that she had staggered, unconscious from a half-dozen wounds, into my arms.

Gaboreau had made the use he did of her, not because there were so few who could have played the part—and he could have furnished a brother and sister that might be visible at the same time—and perhaps used even more caution than Jeanne, but because he could trust her absolutely.

When he was put down in a chair by her bed in my house he was terribly agitated. In her presence what good qualities there must have been in the once young colonel of chasseurs seemed to rise close to the surface. This was apparent less from his direct words than by the fact that he did not reproach her for having failed to deceive Leonore Musset, but did reproach her for having run the risks which brought her so near to the coffin.

More through the kindness of Vivian—not to forget the solicitude of Rob—Jeanne could not say too much for the attention I had given her, and assured her uncle, without having had an inkling that he and I were, after a manner, very well acquainted, that I was a remarkably generous and commendable gentleman.

It may or may not be significant that Gaboreau said nothing to that beyond remarking that I would be fully thanked.

They talked together for a long time, so long in fact that Mrs. Morrison grew tired and hunted out Vivian to ask about bed linen as an excuse for chatting.

She found Vivian in an ill humor, as might naturally be the case when Yang, George and Jerry were in the house and I was gone, and no one knew where or why.

"Linen? Linen!" Vivian cried. "What is linen to me when my husband is gone?"

Mrs. Morrison, a pious soul, was instantly thrillingly scandalized by the word "gone" and attempted to console Vivian out of her own matrimonial experience.

"Men are all alike, my dear. It is terrible. You don't mean that he has deserted you? Oh, just that you suspect him. Men will do those things——"

Further consolation was checked by an indignant outburst from Vivian who is naturally quite jealous—and admittedly is proud of it—but swiftly and sharply explained that my being "gone" meant that I was out looking for trouble, but not the kind of trouble that Mrs. Morrison could understand or even imagine.

Vivian in a temper is not a pleasant companion, and Mrs. Morrison would probably have retreated with hands uplifted in shocked amazement if the roar of a gun had not reverberated through the house at that point, and after a moment's awed inaction, both women rushed from the room, and down the stairs.

What had happened was rather complicated and deadly.

Dr. Roberts, after restlessly thumbing a number of books in the library, had unexpectedly come upon Yang who squatted concealed in a corner behind a large vase that Vivian had paid an outrageous price for under the impression that it was valuable. It may have been. That is beside the story. The vase was large and in a shadowed corner that commanded the front hall. Yang, with his eyes unwinkingly fixed through the doorway, sat gently rubbing his long knife across the

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palm of his hand, and gave not the slightest attention to the doctor's approach.

As many times as Dr. Roberts had been in the house he had never before seen Yang, which was not so very strange considering the Chinaman's uncanny faculty for keeping out of sight and his dislike for the curiosity of strangers; and when he did see him the doctor's hair rose at right angles and he almost toppled backward for the doctor was sure that he had come upon the assassin whom I expected.

Had he used a tithe of those wits that he brought to the treatment of patients he would have known that it was impossible for him to come upon that waiting Chinaman without having been seen; but because Yang did not look toward him, the doctor felt he had surprised the murderer and, summoning all of his self-possession, tried to walk casually out of the room and began to look for some member of the household.

He found George sitting in the dark of the dining-room and patiently waiting to see if any one would fire through the window at the dummy of myself which had been placed invitingly near a lighted and opened window. Of course the bait was rather obvious, and I had known it when I had given instructions; but I had in some quarters a reputation for being disdainful of threats as well as of danger—which I am not—so I had reasoned that a man who had been given orders to kill me would only thank fortune for so good a mark and not be suspicious. Whether it was some agent of H or of Gaboreau's that would strike I did not know.

George did not laugh at the doctor. No. In fact, he very much sympathized with him, for George had a dislike of the Chinaman that was augmented by his horror of a knife, particularly of Yang's; but he did explain that I, for some incomprehensible reason, set store by that yellow fellow and gave him the run of the house.

The doctor was relieved to hear this, but his nerves were rather disturbed, so he suggested a drop of whisky, and George remembered that he had had nothing to eat and proposed a cup of coffee for the doctor, being of the mind to make one for himself.

The doctor went into the dining-room and George into the kitchen.

A few minutes later both rushed out in alarm even before the echoes of the gun fired in the front hall had died.

I HAD told Yang that as he loved his life not to take his eyes from that front hall, for I knew that the man who came so bright and early to fix it had but one purpose and that was to get a duplicate key; and a duplicate key was good for nothing except to let some one in who had no honest business coming. It was a very simple deduction.

Dr. Roberts had hardly left the room before the door opened. Yang could see the door swing back before he could see who stood at the entrance, but he at once vanished behind the vase, moved noiselessly across the library and stood in the portières, which of course were drawn open on the rod. He stood motionless as a statue, as yet unaware of who had come in, for he did not venture to risk being seen and frighten off the intruders before they were fairly caught.

Yang of course could not relate all this detail, but he can write a bit of English and is a master of pantomime. His purpose was to wait until the man, or men, came far enough into the hallway for him to be between them and the door.

Two men had come in. They stood for some seconds listening, watching. One was a thin-faced, scrawny, degenerate type of youth, with a low-drawn cap and a stealthy manner: the sort of fellow who is in Paris called an apache and in New York passes as a gunman. He carried in his hand a gun. The other was a swarthy man, huge of build, but not in height, a broad, heavy fellow, and in his hand he carried a curved knife: he was the Butcher, the Turk wrestler, who had already brought death under my roof.

They seemed to know quite well what they were about, for after a sweeping quick survey of the library they turned into the living-room where my dummy reclined as though in sleep. The bullet-mark, or what was to pass as a bullet-mark, was on the side furthest from them.

The apache leveled his gun on the dummy, ready to fire if the figure should spring into action before the other had driven his blade home. Why he had not shot through the window I do not know. Whether it was the hope to commit the crime noiselessly, or whether, having been

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provided with the key, the Butcher could not resist the lust of drawing blood from another victim's throat, would be difficult to say; but the reason is probably one or the other.

Yang glided like a phantom from behind the portières not fifteen feet from the back of the apache who stood with a bead drawn, ready to shoot. Before the man had a suspicion that any one was near, Yang put the long razor-like blade against his throat. Yang's purpose was to disarm him quietly and slip forward to the other; but the apache had not the nerve to endure so surprising an ordeal. He foolishly jerked himself back and attempted to turn the gun on Yang; but the gun was knocked up even as the trigger was pulled, and the knife swept through his throat—and Yang leaped forward upon the Butcher, who had whirled with blade poised.

The Turk evidently thought himself ten times the match of that slight grotesque figure with the wraith-like knife, for he rushed with a powerful sweep of his own broad, curved blade; but Yang, flattening himself almost to the floor, had vanished from under the blow, at the same time making an upward thrust that slashed the right arm of the Butcher, wounding but not disabling it.

The Butcher, who did not understand how a man could live after he had struck at him, stood for a moment like one breaking out of a nightmare, then rushed again, but more warily. Yang could not fence: that is, he did not dare let his own frail blade attempt to fend and turn the heavy knife of the other, so he gave ground readily, darting and circling with incredible rapidity, and feinting with such a whirl of steel as almost to dazzle the eyes.

The Turk was a knife-fighter of skill, but at very much of a disadvantage, for he could hear the clamor and clatter as people came down the stairs, and as George and the doctor broke into the room. Yang took desperate risks. His reach was shorter than the Turk's, his arm weaker, but again and again he came close enough to entice the powerful brute to lunge and quicker than the eye could follow slashed at the arm and wrist.

The Turk's effort ceased to be to stab Yang as much as to reach the door. Had he been a smaller man he might have bounded out of the open window, but it was toward the door he pressed, and Yang had to give back.

But Yang did a magnificent thing, truly Oriental, and as heroic as anything that has ever come to my attention. Help was at hand. Rob and Jerry were already halfway down the stairs, George and Dr. Roberts were in sight. He alone stood between the Turk and the door and he must be driven through it almost at once; but as he backed through the hall and toward the door, he suddenly leaped further than was needed to avoid the Butcher's knife, and groping with his left hand behind him slammed the door shut.

The second's delay that it would have taken to open that door, even over his dead body, would have given the others a chance to rush forward and grapple with the Turk. But Yang had no intention of leaving his dead body there. Cornered as he was, and the whole action taking scarcely more than ten or fifteen seconds, he feinted high right and left, then swiftly threw himself to the floor, back down, almost under the Turk and with an upward drive buried the long slender knife in the huge man's bowels—then scrambled like a shadow in its flight between his legs while the Turk swayed, clutched a moment convulsively at the deadly blade sheathed in his own body, dropped his knife, and toppled like an ox to the floor.

THERE was great commotion, as may be imagined, the most of which was made by Mrs. Morrison, who, having come upon the scene and seeing more bloodshed, cried out that it was a terribly iniquitous house, and did nothing for minutes but wave her arms and cry in a loud voice until she saw no one was paying attention to her. There was much else to give attention too; for Vivian, seeing what she took to be my body motionless amid all that disturbance, thought death had reached me at last and rushed forward, but not before George had intervened and pled with her to be calm.

At such a moment one might as well have suggested calmness to a whirlwind. Moreover, Vivian was to him the queen of the earth and he would no more have thought of laying violent hands on her than of striking his sister.

Dr. Roberts too forgot, and rightly, that he was to officiate over a dummy

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because one man who had ceased to live and another in terrible agony with but a short grace of life, required attention.

Rob, however, thinking that I was dead, rushed to the dummy, saw the ghastly mark, and cried out that I had been shot; and in the hurly-burly neither he nor Vivian noticed that the mark on the dummy's head could not well have been made with a bullet fired within the house.

Vivian, highly excited, actually stood before that figure of wax and did not discover that it was not cold flesh, and she verged on to madness from the shock.

The groaning of the dying Turk was hideous and filled the room; and though he was a thrice-dyed assassin and would have been hanged if saved, Dr. Roberts was on the floor beside him working hard to stanch the wound, for like a true physician he took up the challenge wherever Death threw down the gauntlet, though, as in this instance, he knew the case was hopeless.

But at last he resorted to the only way left to cheat Death and injected morphin, easing as mean a villain as ever lived of dying pains, and helping him to slip from the world in sleep as quietly as though he had rounded his full fourscore years and was dozing off by a fireside to awaken no more.

Two sheets were brought and one was drawn over the form of the apache, who had fallen in a heap with his head practically dissevered and lay washed in his own blood, and thereby perhaps by death atoning for all his sins and crimes, which, no matter how many of them had escaped the police records, were written on his thin, evil face. But death, common as it is and as inevitable, wipes out all scores and reduces those who stand in its presence to respectful awe.

The Turk was carried from the hallway into the library and a pillow was placed under his head by Dr. Roberts.

Bessie, who had come and seen and was horrified, rushed back up the stairs, but at the top was frightened almost out of her wits for she thought that she had come upon another wounded man, a most grotesque and fearful creature. He was pulling himself along like an animal with a broken spine, and cried out at her to know what was going on.

"Mr. Richmond's been murdered—and other people too!"

"Everhard!" Gaboreau shouted at her.

"No, Mr. Richmond. Shot through the head," and she ran on, leaving bits of lace from the hem of her new dress in the hand that clutched out to hold and question her further.

Rob helped Vivian to a chair and she sat dry-eyed and silent, just staring, staring, staring first at the dummy, then at the sheeted figure on the floor, then through the doorway into the library.

"I am calling the police," Dr. Roberts said to her.

She did not answer.

Suddenly her eyes were turned toward the stairs, and there half-way down, crawling, with his shapeless legs trailing, his bald head lifted and fierce, grotesque face set inquiringly, came Gaboreau.

Vivian sprang to her feet, leveled a horrified and accusing finger and screamed—

"Gaboreau!"

A tableau could not have brought those present into more surprised attitudes. George held a handkerchief to his moist forehead, Rob stood with a foot advanced as though turned to stone in the very act of walking, Dr. Roberts held a lighted match that was being carried to a cigaret until the fire reached his fingers and he dropped it as though galvanized into life; Jerry was caught in the very act of lifting the Turk's knife from the floor.

"Yes, madam, Gaboreau!"

The man spoke with incredible dignity, particularly for one in so miserable a plight as to be sprawled head foremost on the stairs; but there was that in his voice which expressed his innate power, and nothing could more remarkably have revealed his tremendous qualities than that, in so awkward a position and in a hostile house, by his voice and eyes he dominated those who heard and saw. The demoniac has some of the attributes of the divine in that it is superior to those little artifices that heighten the impressiveness of common clay.

"You have killed my husband!" Vivian said in those flat mechanical tones of the stunned woman who seems to speak unconsciously, in a detached sort of a way, while her brain, as if commanding inaction, even dulness of the body, is busily concocting the madness that will soon launch her into fury.

She had never before seen Gaboreau, but

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she knew as much about him as I did, and no other man that lived could fit the description; and though both George and Jerry knew that he was in the house, yet in his unexpected presence there was both the thrill of his personality and scarcely the less thrill of his reputation.

"No, madame," he said, placing himself upright. "I did not kill your husband. I have tried to. I am tonight very thankful that I did not succeed. I do not say this to you with any idea that it will be the slightest consolation, I do not intend that it shall be, but only that you may know vengeance will not thirst: those who are responsible for his death will soon meet with their own."

"But you have threatened him! You have had him shot at. You have tormented me with threats to him, and now you have killed him!"

"Your husband and I have had the misfortune to be enemies, but I have admired him too much to assassinate him. He was killed by German agents."

"You lie!" Vivian screamed. "And you men stand here like mummies and let that thing frighten and fool you. I will kill——"

And breaking off she dashed forward, seized the knife from Jerry's hand and rushed at the stairs with the long curved blade uplifted.

Gaboreau did not move, he did not speak. Whatever else he may have been, there was nothing about him that was craven. He sat like a gargoyle of stone with eyes of black diamonds.

Vivian stopped with knife poised to strike, struggled with her senses, and dropped the knife; then turned, breaking into tears and furiously sobbing as she slowly withdrew and rested on the arm that Rob placed about her.

"Well," said Jerry, coldly, grimly, stepping on to the stairs. "I don't know what to do with you."

"Take me to my own house."

Gaboreau said it simply, authoritatively. Jerry felt the impulse to do just that. Even at the time he could not understand it; and afterward it puzzled him even more. But he did not do it. He did not start to. He picked Gaboreau up and carried him back to the room where his niece, much disturbed and anxious, was listening to the garrulous nurse's awful tale of what had happened.

Gaboreau was no sooner out of sight than both Dr. Roberts and George began explaining to Vivian that the thing she was weeping over was nothing but wax and wire covered with cloth. Of course she thought them crazy, but when it was partly stripped and thrust under her eyes, she saw that indeed it was a manikin, and her grief turned to anger at them for having let her be wracked; and she demanded to know why I had not told her the thing was being prepared.

Truly I was much to blame, and in a way utterly heartless, but though I had no way of knowing, or guessing, that she would make such a demonstration on Gaboreau, yet I did know that he would probably be more convinced that I was dead by her manner than by his own eyes, and he could detect artifice in acting as quickly, if not more so, than in wax. Above all things just then I wanted him to believe I was not only dead, but that the evidence to implicate him was sufficient to be embarrassing.

There is not much more to relate from that angle. The police came. Dr. Roberts lied in saying that I had been mortally wounded, but everything else was the truth so far as he knew it. The policemen were not ignorant of my name, or of the fact that I might from many sources be attacked by persons, desperate and murderous. Reporters came and telephoned, and seemed anxious to believe that I really could not live; and they quested among old files, sent telegrams around the country to get details of other affairs in which I had been concerned, and the morning papers treated me as a person not so much of consequence to the community as of interest.

I was spoken of as the "square gambler," which I never was if I needed money; as the "man with the deadly eye," a rank enough libel to have made me independent for life even with a fledgling lawyer on the case; as a "living dime novel hero," but having never read one of the things I can not say how accurate that may be though I do not like the phrase.

But I am skipping my own part in the evening's events.

TO BE CONTINUED

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ALIAS WHISPERING WHITE

by W C Tuttle

Author of "The Hand of Providence," "Pie for Magpie," etc.

ONCE in a while you'll meet a feller that you couldn't help liking, even if he took a shot at you, and that's how me and Magpie felt about Franklyn Burt. He sure knowed minerals sixteen ways from the jack, but he didn't act like he knowed a whole lot more than the rest of us old sourdoughs at that.

His card said that he was a mining engineer. He just poked around our prospect, putting me and Magpie wise to a lot of new things on timbering and so forth, and what he didn't find out about our mine wasn't much. Said he was from Redfield, that he was quite well, thank you, and we made him as welcome as a mess of trout.

One day Magpie has been to Piperock, and when he comes back he's got a letter for Franklyn. It's the first one he's got since he came, which is more than Magpie and me gets in a whole year unless somebody sends us a catalog, telling us where we can get a suit of clothes for seven dollars and eighty-eight cents, and an extra pair of pants free.

Franklyn peruses that letter, while me and Magpie throws a feed together, and all of a sudden he groans and spits out a man-sized cuss word.

"I'd say that Frankie has been reading the news," says Magpie to me.

Frankie throws down the letter, disgusted like, and stares into space.

"Uncinch, son," advises Magpie. "There ain't nothing broke so badly that it can't he helped. Give us a look at your cards."

"She's going to marry a duke," says he, in a far-away voice, "a blasted duke, with one foot in the grave."

"Pshaw!" says Magpie. "Maybe we can push him the rest of the way."

"You don't understand, boys," says Frankie, shaking his head. "It isn't her so much—it's her aunt."

"Yes'm," says I, "her aunt is going to marry the duke."

"No, Ike, I wish she were. Marion White and I were raised together, went to the same school and college, and we've—well, I wish you could see her, and then you'd know why I don't want her to marry a duke."

"Why specify any certain breed?" grins Magpie. "You means that you sort of browses around the same range. I don't blame you, son. I'd go back there and scare him so bad that he'd swim back home without even taking time to put on a bathing-suit. Does her folks cotton to this duke stuff, and where does auntie horn into the game?"

"Her family consists of Wilberforce Van Veen and wife, Marion's uncle and aunt. They are her mother's sister and brother-in-law, and they act as guardians to Marion, and run the household. The bread-winner of the family is her father's brother, Samuel White, known as 'Whispering' White.

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"He made a mint of money down in Brazil, died and left it all to Marion. Of course, being guardians for Marion, the Van Veens sure did horn into society, and —well, they spoiled things for me. They filled Marion's curly head with foolish ideas, and——"

"Left you holding the sack," grins Magpie, sympathetic like. "Now this Whispering White——"

"He didn't die," states Frankie. "His wealth was practically all in the States, and the estate was settled up right away after he was reported dead by the Brazilian Government, and the Van Veens dove into society. One day Marion got a letter from her uncle. He had seen the papers, in which his obituary was printed, and the settlement of the estate. He told her that he was so glad to be able to read the sad news that she could keep the money—it would be hers, anyway.

"He's down there making another stake. It seems that a couple of natives broke into his place and stole some clothes and some emeralds, or something like that. He nailed the clothes thief, while he was after the jewel robber, and the authorities, finding the body clothed in Whispering's clothes, took it for granted that it was he, reported the death, and buried the remains. It was about two weeks after Whispering had caught him, and they didn't make a very thorough identification."

"He must think a heap of the girl," says I, and Frankie nods.

"Yes, I suppose he does, in a way. He never saw her in his life. In fact he never saw either of the Van Veens. He's been a rover all his life, mostly in foreign lands and in the West, and he never was in Redfield."

"Now, about this here duke," says Magpie, waving us up to the table. "Where does he hail from, and why?"

"The Duke of Northmore," says Frankie. "Never saw him in my life, but I know the type. A perfect lady, scented from his bawth, cawn't stand excitement, and thinks that everybody wild enough to eat meat is a bounder and a beastly bore, don't you know?"

"Aw-w-w!" drawls Magpie, screwing a dollar into one eye, and twisting his face out of plumb in order to hold it there.

"That's it!" whoops Frankie. "Where in the world did you ever see the like, Magpie?"

"Shot one once," laughed Magpie. "Dang near got arrested for it, too. It was closed season."

MAGPIE SIMPKINS was built after the plans and specifications intended to be used to build a memorial to a Norway spruce. He's the longest, boniest, wisest-looking person in seventeen States. He's got a rail-splitting face, a tired-looking mustache, and a desire to prove to the world that when brains were passed around he got more than his share.

I was christened Ike Harper, and I ain't never been ashamed enough or scared enough to change it. I got bow-legs, make tracks in the sand like an Injun, and the best disposition on earth. I know when I'm licked, and there's a lot of men who can pull quicker and shoot faster than I can.

Me and Magpie have been puttering around our little mine for quite a long time. She starts out to be a silver proposition, but after a certain depth she turns yaller. We hammers out enough free milling gold to keep us in bacon and beans, and prays that some day a millionaire will drive up in a shiny hack and offer to buy us out.

Frankie don't say much about our mine, but he puts in quite a lot of time puttering around, and writing letters. A few days after he gets that letter he borrows a burro to ride to Piperock. When he comes back we're eating supper, so he fills up a plate with bean soup, and then hauls out a yaller sheet of paper.

"Take a look at this, boys," says he, smoothing the sheet out on the table. "What shall I answer?"

It reads:

Regarding Your Report Offer Fifteen Thousand Cash Limit Twenty. ADAMS.

"Just about what is the puzzle?" asks Magpie, and Frankie grins.

"That's up to you, Magpie—you and Ike. That's a bona fide offer for your little prospect. The wire is from Hartley Adams, the man I'm working for, and he offers you a limit of twenty thousand dollars for your mine, on my report."

"Son," says Magpie, "I'll go back there and kill that duke for you. What'll you do to please him, Ike?"

"Me? I'll count a coup, and wear his hair for a watch-charm. When do we paint up for the war trail?"

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"Thanks," laughs Frankie, but there ain't a lot of joy in his laugh. "I appreciate the spirit, but you can't shoot a man—not even a duke, just because he wants to marry the same girl you do. That's East, boys. It isn't fashionable to kill folks back there."

"Haw!" grunts Magpie, with his mouth full of beans, "sometimes a good scare is better than a bullet. I sort of pines for the East like a bear for a bee-tree. Let's me and you go East, Ike. A change will do us a lot of good. Let's go with Frankie."

Frankie looks us over, and nods sort of pleased like.

"Love to have you," says he. "Why not go? I can wire for a draft on the bank of Silver Bend, and we can settle up things later, in case you accept."

"Accept?" asks Magpie, smoothing his mustache, and looking at me.

"Does a trout accept a fly hook? No, sir, he jumps at it. Consider us as having jumped, Mister Franklyn Burt."

"You and me both," I agrees. "But what'll we do back there, Magpie, and where will we go? We ain't got nobody to visit."

"I have," says he, hitching his belt around, "I have." He pats himself on the chest, and twists his mustache. "Look at me. Give you three guesses who I am, and bet you ten dollars per guess that you're wrong. I am Whispering White!"

"My——!" says I, and Frankie drops a cup of hot coffee on his knees.

Magpie rubs the stubble on his chin, and grins—

"Late of Brazil."

"But-but-but—" stutters Frankie.

"Let the goats do it, son," advises Magpie, and then he points at me.

"This critter is my pardner, also from the nut country, and we've come back to see if anything needs fixing. "What do you think, Frankie?"

"Well!" exclaims Frankie, wide-eyed. "Well, I don't know whether you could get away with it or not."

"Me?" asks Magpie. "Get away with it? Say, son, I've rustled cows and hung rustlers; salted mines and bought salted ones; and I've bit, fought, scratched and shot my way from the cradle up to date, and now you asks me if I can adopt a name and get away with it where I ain't known. Consider yourself answered in the affirmative, and—have some more coffee. What you trying to do—irrigate your knee-caps?"

The next day we takes our burros and pilgrims to Piperock, takes the stage from there to Paradise, and draws five hundred each. That person has wired us a thousand to cinch the deal, and we fixes things up at the bank.

"The feller what invented sleeping-cars was dying from insomnia," states Magpie, after he bumps his head a few times in his bunk. He crawls out and yells for the porter to bring him an ax, so he can knock the head out of his bunk. The porter refused to get him one, so he puts his clothes back on.

"What you going to do, Magpie?" I asks.

"I'm going up to the rear end and set in the sight-seeing car," says he. "Paid money for a bed and all I draw is a bird's nest."

"You-all can't sleep in the observation cah," objects the porter. "You-all simply can't do that."

Magpie reaches into his bunk, hauls out his old Colt, and shoves it inside his waistband.

"For why can't I?" he asks, but the porter went away without making up the bunk across from us, and didn't show up until the party what owned it yelled his head off for a place to sleep.

The next morning, while I'm standing on one ear, trying to inch my pants on, I hears Magpie's voice. I peeks out, and here comes Magpie towing a party down the car with him. This party wears a man-sized bunch of hair on his face, a crooked nose and a pair of eyes what don't match. He's a congenial looking Jasper, and he's wearing a rubber collar just like me and Magpie are.

"Sleep well?" I asks.

"Ike, I want you to meet Mr. Hobbs—knowed after a short acquaintance as 'Homely.' Homely, this is my pardner Ike Harper. We didn't sleep. Me and Homely bought a deck of cards from the porter, and we spent the night pleasantly. Tonight we're going to climb up on top of the car and sleep in the open, eh, Homely?"

"No argument," agrees Homely. "Get into your pants, Ike, and we'll all eat breakfast."

"Where do we stop?" I asks.

"We don't stop to eat," explains Homely. "We eat in the dining-car. This here

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train don't stop for no such things as eats. Sabe?"

Homely points out a feller in the eating-car, and whispers to me:

"I been associating with that feller for some time now, and I'd bet a dobie dollar that he's Jesse James."

He don't look like a bad-man, and he ain't got no visible guns, but when he hands us our bill for breakfast I shakes hands with Homely and congratulates him on his deductions.

Homely can take the biggest drink of whisky you ever seen. Why, that hombre can gasp and inhale a pint. Me and Magpie are temperance beside him. We can't help liking him, 'cause he fits in fine with us. Frankie takes a liking to him, and we plays poker all the way to St. Paul.

Homely can hold more assorted kinds of food on a knife blade than any other living man. It sure takes a steady hand to balance peas, potatoes, meat and bread and gravy on one blade and never spill a drop, but Homely can do it. Everybody on the car watched him, and I'm betting they envied him his ability.

WE GOT off at St. Paul, 'cause we had to change trains. Frankie gets me and Magpie to one side, and tells us that he ain't going on to Redfield with us, 'cause folks might think it's a plant. He'll show up later. Him and Magpie have had some long talks, in which Magpie has learned more about that family than the family knows. Frankie says for us to dress befitting the occasion and our station in life. Of course it's sort of up to Magpie, more than it is me, so me and Homely takes in the town, while Magpie goes shopping.

We has some ham and eggs, and then inspects some of the places where good cheer comes packed in glass. We meets a pleasant sort of a person, who asks us, confidential like, if we'd care to mingle the pasteboards in a nice quiet place.

The quiet place don't interest us none, 'cause we're sufficiently organized to play in a boiler factory, so we bought him a drink and pilgrims away with him. I don't know where he took us, but I do know that it would take six Injuns and a pack of bloodhounds to ever pick up our trail.

We got into a room full of smoke, and there's a good game going. Five-dollar jack-pots, and no limit. The game is filled, so me and Homely joins the crowd around the table. There's a feller right in front of us, wearing an ice-cream suit and big floppy straw hat, and he seems to be winning a-plenty. I can't see his face, but from the way he folds his cards I can see he's no infant at the game.

I stands there and watches the draw on a pot what has been boosted enough to make it worth fighting for. Floppy hat draws one, and the dealer one. The rest petered out before the draw. Homely lights a cigar and says to the dealer—

"Mister, I'd be willing to pay you good wages to show me how you done that."

"Done what?" snarls the feller, squinting up at Homely from under his eye shade.

"Palm cards thataway," grins Homely. "You're setting on a queen that ought to be in your hand, and your hand shows a king what hadn't come due yet, and you done it so slick that I almost missed it."

All of which is a dangerous remark right at that time, if anybody should ask you. Nobody said a word or moved for a few seconds, and then I sees the dealer turn pale. The party in the big hat has sort of leaned back, and when I glances down over his shoulders I see the muzzle of a gun pointing right at the dealer's stummick. The man behind the gun reaches out and begins to remove said pot into his coat pockets.

The party at the right, being out of line of the gun, opines that he's got to exercise his lungs, and he does so with great cheer. He seems to want the police, fire department and a free passage out of there all to once, and just then some darn fool turned off the lights.

Man, there was some going on right there. I reckon there was at least a dozen men in that room, and when the lights went out I hopped back against the wall and let 'em stampede.

I hears the smash of glassware, when somebody tipped over the bar, and conversation consists of curses and yelps. Then comes the pop of a six-gun, and the bullet burnt my ear.

Believe me, Ike Harper ain't no stranger to powder smoke, so I whoops loud and clear, hauls out my old Colt and takes a shot at anything that happens to be in my way. Across from me a gun pops and I gets my ears full of plaster.

Bing goes a gun from the other side, and she settles down to a steady battle. Every

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time I sees a flash I shoots at it, and I reckon the others were doing the same. I shoots six times, and then has to quit, and I reckon the others were in the same fix.

"I wish I knowed where that danged switch was," I hears a voice complain, and then it says again, "Don't shoot, you darn fools—I've found it," and the lights comes on again.

There stands Homely, leaning against the wall, with an empty gun in his hand, and a foolish look on his face. We both looks across the room, where the table is laying on its side, and up over the edge comes a waving lock of hair, then a pair of squinty eyes, and a tired-looking mustache, and Magpie Simpkins breaks into a grin. He climbs to his feet, sets down on the edge of the table, and looks around on the floor.

"Anybody seen anything of that Brazil hat of mine?" he asks. "This sure is one dusty place for an ice-cream suit, if you asks me."

We don't have nothing to say, so he grins at Homely and says—

"Homely, you spoke just in time—all I had was a bob-tail."

Homely scratches his head and shoves his empty gun in his pocket—

"Well, Magpie, you're a rotten shot—that's all I can say."

"That goes triple, Homely," grins Magpie. "You and Ike had an even break. Let's get out of here. Them scared Jaspers will likely call the police."

"Not them," says Homely, "what they'd call a policeman for wouldn't get nobody in jail but themselves."

We had a fine time finding our way out of there, but we manages to get back to the hotel. Magpie is so happy over finding that hat that he forgets the condition of his clothes.

"Some hat," says he. "I told the clerk that I was from Brazil and wanted a hat, and he told me that he had a hat that had been waiting for me a long time. I'm supposed to be from Brazil, Homely."

"Supposed to be?" asks Homely, who ain't wise to our pilgrimage, so Magpie sets down and tells him all about it.

Homely gets excited over it, and offers to help pull the stunt.

"I like Frankie," says he, "and I hate dukes like ——! Let me have first shot at him and I'll go along with you."

"I know how you feel about it, Homely," says Magpie. "If a feller ain't never shot at one he naturally hankers for the experience. I shot at one once, and I know the sensation, but this is going to be a safe, sane and sanitary proposition. Sabe? Naturally I got a lot to say about who spends the money I earned, and I ain't in the market for no shop-worn dukes, but I ain't provoked enough to let you shoot him on sight. Come with us if you like, Homely, but don't pack no gun."

"I'll come," agrees Homely. "Me and Ike will sort of hang around as a body-guard, and shoot him when you throw him out."

IT'S quite some trip from St. Paul to Redfield, but the town was there when we arrived. Some say it was there before the war, which gave the inhabitants an alibi for fighting.

We climbs off the train and let it go on without us. We looks the place over from an unprejudiced standpoint and found her lacking.

There ain't a hitching-rack in sight, and the only bronc we can see has got its tail cropped off short, and is being mishandled by a skinny-looking person, wearing panties, who bobs in the saddle like he had boils. He sure is careful of his saddle.

There's quite a lot of folks at the depot and I'd reckon there ain't many strangers stop there, 'cause everybody stares at us.

We sort of mills around, looking for a place to go, when a dude-looking feller busts out of that herd of inquisitives and pilgrims up to us.

"I beg your pardon," says he to Magpie, "would you mind telling me who you are, and all that, don't you know? I'm with the *Clarion*."

"Real estate, roulette or religion?" asks Magpie.

"Beg pardon? Oh, I see you misunderstood me. I'm a reporter. I—I thought perhaps you—er—might be worth a story. You and your party are so—well, different, don't you know?"

"Story and a half," grins Homely, looking up at Magpie, "go on and tell the kid who you are, old-timer. Me and Harper will see that you get fair play."

"I am Whispering White from Brazil, and other seaports," says Magpie, and that feller's eyebrows rise half an inch.

"Whispering White, the South American millionaire?" he gasps. "The man who

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died, and then came back to life? The uncle of Marion White, who is going to marry the duke?"

"No," says Magpie, "who was going to marry him."

The feller sure got busy on a piece of paper.

"When did you leave Brazil?" he asks.

Magpie scratches his head, and squints at me and Homely.

"When did we leave Brazil?" he asks. "In May, wasn't it?"

"April first," says I.

"And the rest of your party is?" he asks, indicating me and Homely.

"This one," says Magpie, pointing at me, "this is 'Bedrock' Benson, mayor of Pecan Province, and this other one is Homely Hobbs, the greatest squirrel expert in South America, if not in the world."

"Great stuff!" exclaims the feller. "What do you think of Redfield?"

"I knowed a man what got lynched for saying what he thought," says Magpie, "so I'll just keep my face shut."

"I suppose you'll miss the palm and cocoanuts," says the reporter, grinning, and writing fast.

"The palms," agrees Magpie. "Nuts are the same wherever you find them. What is the best hotel in the place?"

He showed us a hotel, and when we pilgrims up to the front door we gets assaulted by some fellers in band uniforms. Magpie chases one of them all over the house, trying to get this valise back. After he nails this feller he takes the valise away from him, picks him up and throws him out of the front door.

"If the boss is in I'd admire to have you ask him if we can have a room with a bed big enough for three men," says Magpie to the person behind the counter, "and I don't want one with a dirty white pitcher setting there in a cracked, white dishpan, either, and if the springs bust down like they did in Silver Bend I'll come down and tie that bedstead around your darn neck. Sabe? Now do we connect with our desire or don't we?"

"You-you-you—" stutters the feller, and he turns a big book around in front of Magpie, and hands him a pen.

"Register," says he. Magpie looks at the pen and book, and then at the feller.

"I didn't come here to vote," says he, "I came here to sleep."

"What name, please?" asks the feller, and Magpie gets mad.

"Young feller," says he, "I don't like this town. Folks want to know your name and occupation the minute they see you. I'm Whispering White, of Brazil. These two with me are Bedrock Benson and Homely Hobbs. We're all from Brazil. Now, do we get that room?"

"Yes, Mr. White," says he, getting friendly all to once, "surely you do. You'll want rooms with bath?"

"Bath?" asks Magpie, turning to us, "you fellers dirty?"

"I got dusty crossing the ocean," says I, and Homely speaks up:

"I'll take a little bath with you, Whispering, if I lose. I'm game."

A couple of fellers packs our grips over to a little room, and we all goes in with them, and that room goes skyhooting toward the sky. We found out later that they only built the stairs to keep folks from falling down the hole.

It was before noon when we gets there, and along about two o'clock the alarm rings. Homely sabes the thing, so he yells into the box on the wall—

"What do you want?"

Then he sort of grins at Magpie, and says—

"Mister Van Veen is down-stairs and wants to know if he can come up."

"Tell him it's a public place," says Magpie, "and that I can't stop him."

He came. The first thing I noticed was that he's got dimples where his knuckles ought to be, and his finger-nails are pink. His face is fat and pink, and he wears specs that would make good magnifying glasses, and he anchors them to his person with a yard of crape ribbon. He exudes a scent that you'd naturally connect with a lisp and he carries a cane.

He stands there in the doorway, peering at us like a dude owl, and pretty soon he hauls out a big silver case, takes out one of them cigarets what smell like a disinfectant, taps same three times on the case, and clears his throat. I names him "Pinky" right there.

"My ——!" snorts Magpie. "Am I related to that?"

"I am—er—looking for Samuel White," says he. "Which one of you—er—gents are he?"

"I are he," says Magpie. "But I'm no er-gent. What you selling?"

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"Selling? Haw! I am your—er—relative. Mr. Wilberforce Van Veen, at your service."

"Thanks," says Magpie, "I don't need you today. Come on in and rest your feet. How's the folks?"

"Thank you. Very well, I thank you. I read in the *Clarion* of your arrival, and it was a great—er—surprise, I assure you. How do you find Redfield?"

"By getting on the right train and getting off at the right depot," says Magpie. "Meet Bedrock Benson and Homely Hobbs, Van."

"Aw! Pleasure, I assure you," says he.

"Glad you think so," says Homely. "How's your folks?"

"Well, I thank you," and then he turns to Magpie: "May I have a few minutes' private conversation with you, Samuel?"

"Shoot," says Magpie, "don't mind these hombres, Van. They know more about my business than I do, so don't mind them in the least."

"It is in regard to—er—Marion and the Duke of Northmore," says he, nervous like, lighting another joss-stick. "You—er—must have intimated to the reporter that you were not in favor of the union, and—er—I came up to ask you to call them up and—er—sort of correct the error, don't you know? They must have misunderstood you. The preparations for the wedding are under way, and such a report at this time might—er—well, prove embarrassing. You understand, don't you?"

Magpie rolls a cigaret, and sort of grins under his mustache.

"How is the duke fixed?" he asks.

"You mean his financial standing? Really, you can't figure things that way, old fellow. His title, the title he can give Marion, can not be summed up in dollars and cents. I dare say he's comfortable."

"Comfortable?" grins Magpie, "Maybe we can change that. Does my niece know I'm here?"

"No, she does not. She and the duke are motoring today. I shall have to do everything I can to block you in case you try to interfere in any way. My wife and I are her recognized guardians, remember."

"Pinky," says I, "don't rile him. Whispering is a holy terror when he's riled, and if you get too blasted futty he'll take your pocketbook away from you, and you'll have to go to work. Sabe?"

"Them is words of wisdom," agrees Homely. "A dollar in the hand is worth two dukes in the family, Van, old scout. Could you use a glass of milk and sugar if I was to offer to treat the crowd?"

"Why—er—really I don't know," says he, bewildered like. "I believe I must go now. I hope to see you all again. Pleased to have met you. Good afternoon," and he softly closed the door.

"Magpie," says Homely, "you ain't no gentleman. Always take off your hat when a person like that talks to you. Ain't you got no manners? You embarrassed him extremely."

"Manners!" snorts Magpie. "No, I ain't, Homely. I ain't got no judgment, either, or I wouldn't have picked that show-shoe rabbit for a relative. I wonder what Marion is like?"

WE FOUND out the next day. The three of us walks out to the Van Veen residence. It sure looks like a lot of money surrounded by a brush fence, and when Homely sees it he says to Magpie:

"You must have made a lot of money in Brazil. Nice place to live."

"Yeah," says Magpie, "nice but not homelike. Why, Homely, a lizard wouldn't live in a place like this, and a rattlesnake would bite himself inside of a week. No sagebrush nor rocks, and I ain't seen a man here what ain't pink in the face. It sure does ruin the human race living in a place like this."

We hammers on the front door, and a general opens the door for us. We all bows to him, and Magpie says:

"Colonel, we're glad to meet you. I'm Whispering White, and this is Bedrock Benson and Homely Hobbs."

We all shakes hands with him.

"How's the army?" asks Homely.

"Beg pardon," says he, with his nose in the air. "Who shall I announce?"

"Gosh," snorts Magpie, "he's going to make an announcement. Go ahead, Officer."

"Beg pardon," says he, getting red as a beet. "Who shall I announce?"

"Who have you got?" grins Magpie. "We came up to see Marion White, but if you got anything else we'll look it over."

"Ah!" says he. "Step into the drawing-room, and I will inform Miss Marion of your presence."

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"Merry Christmas," says Homely, and we all follers the officer into a room what reminds me of molasses. Everything is dark and heavy, and your boots don't even squeak on the floor. Some folks seem to be afraid of a little sunshine, so I goes over to let up a shade, when I hears a female voice say: "Quite a surprise!" and I turns just in time to see Magpie kiss her.

Magpie sure knows how to play a part, I can say that much for him, but his judgement is all wrong.

"Sir!" she yelps. "How dare you! I am Mrs. Van Veen," and Magpie got his face slapped.

He goes plumb up to his ears in a soft chair, and Homely whistles—

"Set 'em up in the other alley!"

"My mistake, ma'am," says Magpie. "It's so blasted dark in here that I didn't see who I was kissing. Now that I can see you I'm ashamed of myself."

"Are you Samuel White?" she asks, and I can see the frost on her breath.

"Of Brazil, ma'am," admits Magpie; "how's the folks?"

"You wished to see Marion?"

"Gosh!" snorts Magpie. "I came all the way from Brazil, sent an army officer to tell her I was here, and now I got to wish. All right, auntie, I'll wish. Now can I see her?"

"Uncle Samuel!" says the voice of a mocking bird behind me, and Ike Harper got his first free kiss. Man, I'd orate aloud that she's some filly. Me and her exchanges hugs, and then I breaks the clinch.

"Ma'am," says I, "you sure shows good judgment, but that long hombre over there is your uncle."

Magpie meets her half-way, and I can hear auntie sniff. Pretty soon they breaks away, and looks foolish like at each other, and Magpie says:

"Ain't you got no place where there's light enough for us to see each other? I don't like this cell."

"Let's go out on the porch," she suggests. "I want to meet the rest of your friends."

"I kissed your aunt," says Magpie, apologetic like. "I'd have kissed your uncle, too, but he was smoking a vile cigaret."

Marion laughs like she was amused, and we all goes out on the verandy, and gets used to each other's looks. She's some looker in the light, and I says to myself—

"I don't blame Frankie, and I'm glad she made that mistake."

Homely watches her while he rolls a cigaret. She must have attracted him some, 'cause he throws away his cigaret and puts the match in his mouth, and says—

"Say, you ain't going to marry no duke, are you?"

Her eyebrows goes up about an inch, and she stares at Homely.

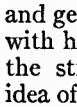
"Ex-cuse me!" he gasps, and puffs hard on the match.

"Why," says she, offended like, "why ask that when the announcements are all out, and——"

"My——!" says I. "More announcements, boys. When do we see the duke?"

"He's at his hotel," says Marion. "We are having a reception here tonight. Perhaps you can arrange a meeting tomorrow." And then her and Magpie strolls away up the verandy for a personal visit, while me and Homely takes off our boots to rest our feet, and sets down to wait for him to break away.

We tells her we're a heap glad to meet her, and then we goes back to the hotel. Magpie has a drink with us, and then orates that he's going to buy some more clothes and get his hair cut. We don't want to go with him, so me and Homely pokes around the streets. Watching a hair cut is my idea of nothing to see.



WE'RE standing on a corner when here comes Pinky in an automobile. He didn't aim to see us, I reckon, so me and Homely both yelled at him to stop, and then we pilgrims out to his buggy. He didn't tell us not to, so we climbs in with him, just as a policeman comes up. He tips his hat to Pinky, and says—

"Anything I can do for you, Mister Van Veen?"

Pinky looks at me and Homely, and his gills get sort of red, but then he shakes his head —

"Nothing, Officer, thank you."

"You sure stand in with the law, Van," says Homely. "Let's all go have a drink. What do you say, Van?"

"Why—er—really, don't you know, I'm afraid——"

"We'll protect you with our lives," states Homely. "Won't we, Ike?"

"To the death," says I. "Drive careful,

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'cause I got a gun on my hip, and it might jolt off and ruin a cushion."

Pinky didn't seem in the best of spirits, but he took us out in the country to a place where they sells everything from soda water to souls. He wanted to drink mineral water, but we objects so hard that he decides in favor of real liquor.

Pinky is the hardest man I ever tried to get six drinks into, and after that he's the hardest to choke off. He sure did surprise me.

"Reshepshun tonight," says he, wise as a owl. "Bes' people in the city. Duke'll be there. Duke's a lion—you know it?"

"Mostly all do lie more or less," agrees Homely. "Are we invited?"

"Sure. Friends of mine—besshur life. Got evenin' clothes?"

"Night-gown party, eh?" gulps Homely, along with a pint of liquor. "Pass. I'm a respectable person, Van."

"Dresh shuit," says Pinky. "Le's all go to tailor, eh? Get shuited for party. What shay?"

"No argument," agrees Homely. "If there's any shooting going on you can count me in. Lead us to Mister Tailor, and may the Lord have mercy on his shoul."

All of which shows that Homely is beginning to thicken. Me—I'm getting beautifully primed.

We went to the tailor's about a hundred and fifty dollars' worth. Pinky insists on dressing us right there, so we left our week day garments in his care, and got back in that machine.

We're pretty dry, so we hunts a place to wet them new suits. I don't like a coat you can't button, and them pants are too tight to go over the tops of my boots, so I tucks them inside. Pinky's crazy any time he thinks we're going to dress up that much and then wear high collars and white ties.

We tore them off in that palace of vice, and then bought us each a red one, and two new rubber collars. Homely got a red four-in-hand, with black horseshoes on, while I got a pure red one of the kind you can cross and tie off each end to your suspenders.

I never felt so aristocratic in my life, and Homely looks like a actor. He feels so good that he stands on the sidewalk and sings:

"I'm a buckaroo from Bucktown and I drinks my m' whisky clear.
I a rearin' rootin' tooter, a son-of-a-gambolier."

The same of which makes a hit with Pinky, and we has to stand right there and sing it until he learns the words. Then Pinky throws the quirt into that automobile, and we ambles for home. Pinky would sure make good on a cross-country drive after coyotes, but four wheels are too many, and the road ain't wide enough, 'cause he ignores the road entirely, jumps a brush fence, skates all around over a nice grassy plot, and when I wakes up I got flowers in my mouth and dirt in my ears.

Homely is setting there in a fountain, splashing water, and Pinky is hugging a female statue, and whispering words of love into its ear. The hind end of the autobile is sticking out of the side of a little lath house covered with vines, and one wheel is still turning, and I wonders, foolish like, if it will stop on oo or the red.

I wipes the dirt off my face, and walks over to the wreck. Homely swims to land, and Pinky gets disgusted when the lady don't talk back to him, so we all goes over inside the little house.

"Tha's shame," says Pinky, "never went in here before. Wife'll have shixteen fits—you know it? Peculiar woman is Louisa. Ever met her?"

"Whispering kissed her by mistake," says I, and Pinky chuckles, and looks wise.

"Tha's bes' way. Married her by mistake myshelf. I'm always making mistakes—you know it? Have shixteen fits."

"Bottle didn't break," announces Homely, fussing around inside the automobile. "Let's all have a snort and take a nap. Nice and cool in here. Over the lips and through the gums: look out, Stummick, here she comes."

"That's shome toast," applauds Pinky. "Mush tell that at club. Ho, hum-m-m-m-m!" and he went to sleep with his head through a busted wheel, while me and Homely curls up on the seats.

"Homely," says I, "are you comfortable?"

"Am now," says he, "the front of this blasted shirt kept doubling up and shutting off my wind, but now I got her bent out of the way. How do you like Pinky?"

"Just like a cucumber—pickled but not raw. They upset my stummick."

I don't know how long I slept but when I woke up I can see a light through the door of the shack, so I'd opine it's after dark. Pinky and Homely are snoring, so I rolls

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a smoke. Pretty soon I hears voices, male and female.

"But my deah girl," says the male voice, "you surely wouldn't let a boundah like that interfere. Brazil, indeed! He's not your parent, and when you are mine I'll snap my fingers at him."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," says Marion's voice. "I don't think it would scare him in the least. He surely is unconventional, and has the quaintest pair of men with him."

"Barbarians!" snorts this party, which I'd opine to be the duke, "fancy throwing a bellboy out of the hotel when he essays to carry your luggage. And they eat with their knives! Unconventional? I'd jolly well say that they're uncivilized and uncouth. Shall we enter the Summer-house?"

"I wonder where uncle is?" says Marion. "He hasn't been home since early this afternoon, and auntie is simply furious."

They ambles inside. I reckon it must be dark to them, cause they stumbles over Pinky's legs, and the duke sprawls all over a front wheel. Marion cuts loose a little squeak, and I hears Pinky's voice softly singing:

"I'm a buckaroo from Bucktown, and I drinks my whisky clear.
I'm a rearin', rootin' tooter, a son-of-a-gambolier."

"Uncle!" gasps Marion. "Uncle!"

"Say, what in —— is going on around here?" inquires Homely, sleepy like. "Busting into a man's room this way."

I see him rise up in the machine, grab at something, and I sees a man, with shiny hair, roll out of the doorway and weave toward the house. I reckon Homely cast him fairly hard.

"Tha's good!" proclaims Pinky. "Marion, I'm 'shamed of you. Go in the house shooner or later. Homely, you old Injun, where's that bottle?"

All of which shows that Pinky is getting civilized fast. Marion walks out of there, sort of dazed like, and follers the duke.

"The duke says that we're barbarians, Homely," says I, "he says we eat with our knives."

"Huh! I'd rather be one than to eat with my fork—they leak."

"Le's go way," says Pinky, "Marion will tell Louisa, and I'll have to come in the house. Bes' time I ever had, and I hope you decide to remain here."

"Not if I live," says I, pushing my shirt down so I won't look so chesty. "Let's all go in the house."

"That's sensible," agrees Homely. "Hear the music? Let's all go in and sing a song."

"Tha's the stuff," says Pinky; "all shing a shong. Don't take a drink in there, 'cause they drink punch. I got some in my room, and when that's gone we'll kill the butler and rob the cellar. I'm a rearin' rootin' tooter—wish I lived in Brazil."

"You'd do well there," says Homely, "in fact, you'd flourish."

We weaves around to the front door. Everything is decorated up, and some folks are getting out of an automobile on to a strip of carpet, which seems to lead into the door. We goes over and wipes our feet off, too, locks arms and goes for the doorway.

That blamed army officer is there again. I'll bet that hombre has got an over-sized Adam's apple or he's studying the stars, 'cause he pokes his long nose in the air and looks right over our heads. Me and Homely shakes hands with him, and then gives his hand to Pinky, who shakes it, hearty like.

"Shimmons," says Pinky, earnest like, "we'd like to be announshed and introdushed."

"Beg pardon, sir," says he, still looking up.

Homely looks him over, steps behind him and kicks him in the back of the knees. We left him setting on the steps, and walked on.

"I'll announish us," says Pinky. "Forward, marsh!"

SAY, there was some herd in that room. I never seen so much of so many ladies in my life, and I'd 'a' likely went right out if I had been sober. The man are all wearing unbuttoned coats like ours, so I feels sort of at home. They all turns as we comes in, and Pinky waves his arms like a windmill.

"Ladies and gentlemen," says he, loud like, "Mister Bedrock Benshon, and Homely Hobbs, late of Brazil. Boys thish aggre-gation is all folks that know me. They never had a good time in their lives, 'cause they're afraid to. Shake hands with 'em."

Homely gathers in the hands of a tall, skinny dame, and it scared her plumb sick.

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I reckon she never shook hands with a man before. A feller tried to dodge me, but I beat him to it, and give him some grip. He sure is a lily-white person, with one weak eye, which he advertises by wearing glass over it. When I shook his hand he almost wiggled out of his pants.

"Howdy," says I; "how's your folks?"

I reckon he's hard of hearing, 'cause he just stares at me, so I hauls him up close and yells in his ear—

"How's your folks!"

He fainted in a chair.

"Mr. Benson!" says Marion's voice, chiding like, and I turns.

She's standing there looking at the feller in the chair, and then says to me:

"Why—why, that's the Duke of Northmore. Where is my uncle?"

Everybody is quiet for a second, and we hears Pinky's voice:

"You can't, eh? Shay you can't play it? Oh, Homely! Thish orchestra can't play our song. Let's shing without the music, eh?"

Auntie is standing there as white as a statue, and her eyes are as round as saucers. She sure is frozen stiff, and just then I hears a voice that I know. It's Frankie Burt.

"My dear Mrs. Van Veen," says he, low like, "let me handle the situation, please. You don't want a scene." Then he turns to me, and whispers: "Ike, get Homely and Van Veen, and I'll show you where Van Veen's room is."

I walks right over to Pinky, and whispers in his ear—

"I'm dry as ——."

"So'm I, Bedrock," says he, loud like. "Thish ain't no fun. Let's me and you and Homely go up to my room and wet our necks. Come on, Homely, you old rootin' tooter."

Frankie led the procession up them winding stairs. I looks down from the top, and notices that a lot of them folks ain't got their mouths shut yet. The duke is being drenched with a glass of punch, and seems on the road to recovery.

"Pinky," says I, "you ain't going to let Marion marry the duke, are you?"

"Shush," says Pinky, shaking up a bottle; "my wife's doing it. I ain't nothing but a crawling worm in thish house. Wife's crazy over titles. Crazy over everything but me, and I'm glad she draws the line some place. Feel shorry for Marion, but I feel more shorry for me. Have to do everything I don' want to do—except tonight. Man or moush? Which're you goin' to be? Man'r moush? Going ri' down and tell that bunch that I'm a wolf and it's my evening to bark."

"No, you're not, either," says Frankie from the doorway. "For Heaven's sake, Van Veen, have a little sense." Then he turns to me: "Have you seen Mag—er—Whispering tonight?"

"Nope. Is he coming here?"

"Said he was," says Frankie, and just then Pinky sighs deep like and rolls over on the bed.

Homely inhales another pint, and lays down with Pinky.

"Ike," says Frankie, "let's you and I go down and wait for Magpie."

"You go first," says I, "I'll be out in a minute."

I searched Homely for a gun, but didn't find one. You never can tell what he might do—loaded thataway. I went out of the door, and got almost to the top of the stairs, when I hears Marion and Frankie talking low.

"Marion, for God's sake, don't throw yourself away on that fellow," pleads Frankie. "Wake up, girl. Everybody, except your aunt is laughing at you. Your new uncle is dead against it. Why, Marion, the duke hasn't a cent, and he's a mighty poor specimen of humanity. You'll have to agree to that."

"Franklyn," says she, sort of sobbing like, "it's all settled, and it must go through."

"Has Whispering White met the duke yet?" asks Frankie.

"No. He will meet him tomorrow. Excuse me, I must go back to my guests." And I hears her go down the stairs.

I pokes around the corner, and runs into Frankie.

"Cheer up, son," says I. "She ain't married yet. Never give up, not even when they faces the preacher—somebody might shoot him."

"Ike, you're a philosopher," says he, shaking his head, "but I'm afraid it's a hopeless hope for me. Let's go down-stairs."

We went down. Frankie drifted away from me, and I sort of got lost. I wandered around by myself, getting sorer and sorer all the time. Everybody acts like I got the smallpox. I tried to talk to the fiddler, but

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he's deaf and dumb, and when I asks a lady how her kids are she sticks her nose in the air, and drifts.

I tries to get near enough to that army officer to ask him where the water-bucket is but he sees me and lopes out of sight. Auntie passes me once, but I reckon she figured me a white chip in a big stack of blues, 'cause she didn't see me at all. I found Marion after while. She's surrounded with the duke and a lot of other smaller cards, and that duke stared hard at me again.

"Take a look, you poor hunk of hash," says I.

I'm getting tired of being stared at, and I don't even care about Marion, 'cause I'm beginning to think she don't assay any more on brains than the rest. The duke walks like he'd Wintered in a hard pasture and cracked his hoofs. When I snapped at him, his lower jaw sags, and he feels to see if his tooth-brush mustache is still with him.

"Aw!" says he. "Cattle!"

"You dang well know it!" says I. "Where your kind would last about as long as a snowball in ——! Where there's a strong distinction drawn between male and female."

"Mr. Benson!" says Marion, shocked like, but dang me if I don't think she winked one eye.

We must have been talking loud, 'cause when I looks around, 'most everybody is listening.

"Heavens!" I hears auntie gasp. "I'll have him removed at once. Simmons!" she yelps. "Simmons!"

"You don't need to yelp for help," says I; "I'll remove him."

"Mr. Whispering White," announces that army officer, in a loud voice just then, and we all turns.

THERE stands Magpie, with one hand twisted in the army officer's collar, and a grin on his face.

"Thanks, Colonel," says he, shoving him away. "Maybe the next time you see a man at the door you won't stick your blasted nose in the air and refuse him admittance."

Magpie is still wearing that ice-cream suit and big hat. He hitches up his hip pocket and grins at everybody.

"Howdy, folks," says he.

He grins and winks at Marion, and just then I hears a gasp behind me, and I turns. There stands the duke, staring at Magpie, like he was a ghost, and Magpie is staring right back at him.

"Holy horned toads!" grunts Magpie, and reaches for his hip.

The duke moved. The dignity all left that Jasper, and he turns coyote for fair. He ducked behind a lot of half-dressed ladies, and went up them stairs like a bear.

Magpie is sort of handicapped, with so many folks around, but I think his bullet cut the duke's necktie off, 'cause we found it on the stairs. Just as the duke turned the corner he runs slap into Pinky and Pinky came rolling down-stairs just in time to keep Magpie from going up fast. Pinky lights setting up, and Magpie races past him. I hops half-way up them stairs, and pulls a gun, so nobody can interfere with Magpie, but nobody wanted to go up, I reckon.

"Good evening, folks," grins Pinky, looking around, foolish like, but nobody paid any attention to him.

Auntie has fainted flat, and a fat little hombre is fanning her with a glass of punch. Marion is backed against the wall, and Frankie is trying to shake hands with her.

Comes a —— of a racket upstairs, and here comes the duke, Magpie and Homely. Magpie and Homely have each got hold of a coat-tail, and right at the top step the duke shucks his coat, and comes down like a pin-wheel, and into that crowd he goes.

Homely slips on the top steps and don't hit again until he sets down beside me, halfway down. The duke cuts a swath through the crowd, and goes out through an open window like a prairie-dog going into his own home.

Bang goes a gun beside me, and the top pane of the window is busted into a million pieces. I reckon it caused several ladies to foller auntie's example. I turns around and there sets Homely, with a big Colt in his hand, and scowl on his face.

"Missed!" he wails. "Might 'a' knowed he wouldn't go so high. Allowed too much, and over-shot."

"Where did you have that gun?" I asked. "I searched you."

"In my boot, Ike. No pocket in these pants, and the waist is too tight."

Magpie throws that coat down, disgusted like, and puts his gun back in his pocket.

"Dang the luck!" he snorts. "Lost him again!"

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"Again?" I asks. "Did you say again?"

Magpie leans against the corner-post of the stairs, and smooths out his necktie.

"That was the feller what we used to know as 'Diamond Duke,' down in Mesquite," says he. "He's a duke, I reckon, and one of the slickest card sharks on earth. He's a crook from his belt both ways, and ain't got the nerve of a rabbit. Hell-winder with fool women, and talks like a dictionary. Rung in a cold deck on me one night, in a big pot, and was foolish enough to reach for a gun, when I called him. We both shot. I killed him dead, and his bullet went into the ceiling. I went over and gave myself up to the sheriff, and when he went back over there the duke had gone. He'd fainted—that's all. Somehow I can't seem to kill the breed."

"Same here!" grunts Homely, disgusted like. "Allowed too much for the rise."

Auntie has recovered from her faint, and hears Magpie's testimony. She drops like a wilted lily, and looks a million years old.

"R u i n e d!" says she, wailing like. "Everything is ruined." Then she turns to Magpie, and says in a weak voice: "Samuel, will you leave us, please? Tomorrow we will talk things over."

"Yes'm," agrees Magpie. "Come on, Ike."

Everybody is either left or leaving, and there don't seem to be much animation left in the party.

"Our hats are in that shack where we left the automobile," states Homely. "Let's get them and go home."

When we went out of the door we looked back. There sets auntie, sad and deserted like, and over in the corner by the music-stand is Pinky. He's got a fiddle that somebody forgot, and he's discording something awful, and singing:

"I'm a buckaroo from Bucktown, and I drinks my whisky clear.
I'm a rearin', tootin' tooter, a son of a gambolier."

It sure was a grand night for Pinky Van Veen. We went out to that house, and started to scratch a match to locate them hats, when we hears a noise.

"Sounds like somebody walking in mud," chuckles Magpie, and then we hears Frankie say:

"Boys, I never can thank you. Have you fellers got time to shake hands with the future Mrs. Franklyn Burt?"

We sure took time.

"That money is in the bank at Silver Bend," whispers Frankie. "Maybe some day I can do something for you to pay you for this."

"Had a lovely time at your party," says Homely. "Enjoyed it fine, and I sure wish you a lot of luck. Sorry I held that gun too high, but a feller can't be lucky all the time."

We tells them good-by, and goes back to the hotel. Magpie walks up to the counter, and says to the man—

"When do we get a train going West?"

"Ten-thirty," says he, and we all goes upstairs. Magpie begins to pack his valise.

"Where you going?" asks Homely. "Ain't leaving, are you?"

"On that train. Pack up, Ike. I don't like this town, and I'll be danged if I talks things over with auntie, 'cause there ain't nothing left to talk about except the weather. I'm sick for the smell of sage-brush, and I'm sick of the smell of perfume."

Homely packed up, too, and went to the depot with us.

"Come on back to Piperock with us, Homely," says Magpie. "Dang your old hide, you'd fit in fine with the rest of us old pelicans."

"Sure like to," says he, "but I can't. I got to go East on business, but likely some day I'll see you both again. Sure hope so."

We climbs on the steps of the car, and shakes hands with him.

"Come out our way, Homely," says I. "Dog-gone, I'd sure like to see your homely old face out there. The cabin door is open."

"I know it is, Ike," says he. "If you fellers ever get as far south as Brazil look me up, will you?"

"Brazil?" wonders Magpie. "Did you say Brazil, Homely?"

"Uh-huh," yelps Homely, as our train rolls away, "Pernambuco, Brazil. Ask for Whispering White—that's me."

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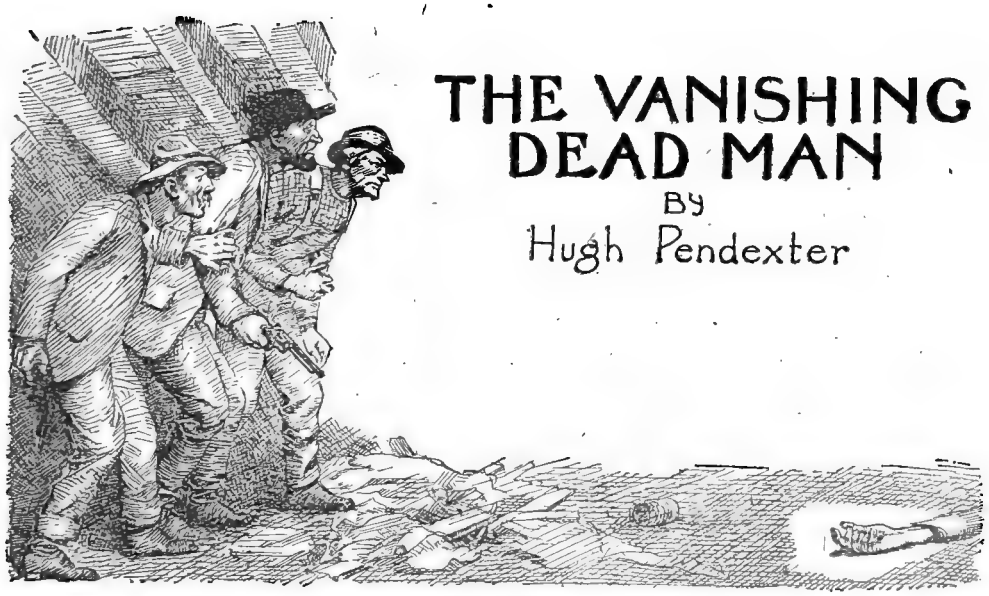

THE VANISHING DEAD MAN

By Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Western Door Swings Open," "The Wilderness Trap," etc.

WHEN the citizens of Paley discussed the old Fanning mansion, some six miles out, the gossip ranged from ghosts to robbers. Rashe Cotton and Eliab Dickby were, perhaps, the first to bring the ancient structure into disrepute by announcing they had seen lights moving through the house. And strange illuminations are always the hallmark of the ghost. It was the only subject the two had agreed upon for several years, as their dislike for each other constituted a village feud.

For those villagers who enjoyed the thrill of ghost yarns the reports on the mysterious lights were pleasing. But when Stephen Joseph, who lived near the old place, seriously asserted his belief that the house was a rendezvous for desperate characters the village abandoned ghosts for more grave speculations. Cotton and Dickby were hunting and fishing fellows, natural vagabonds. Joseph was a man of means and never given to frivolous talk.

The Fanning place became a matter for the authorities to investigate, especially after Joseph warned the town officials he should claim damages if he should be burned out or robbed.

Inasmuch as it had been many years since a sheriff had assumed graver responsibilities than to serve legal papers and arrest an occasional tramp, that official resented the talk. He loathed extra work unless it carried fees. At first he poohpoohed the stories of strange lights, but when Joseph drove to town and informed that he, too, had seen a light the public demanded immediate action.

It was in no pleasant frame of mind that the sheriff one Summer morning took Abner Ham, his deputy, and drove over to investigate. On the way he stopped at the Joseph farm, about a mile from the Fanning estate, and curtly announced he was about "to look into this nonsense." And he added:

"Seeing as how you've stirred up this mess I thought you might want to come along. Then there can't be any backbiting that I wasn't thorough."

"I ain't inclined to do any back-biting," protested Joseph. "I ain't to blame if there's something queer about the place. I just know I don't relish neighbors who may burn me out. I ain't hankering to quit my work, but I'll go with you."

"Strikes me as being an awful lot of bosh," grieved the sheriff. "Takes me from my reg'lar duties. I don't doubt but what a stray tramp sleeps there on a stormy night now and then, but that's better'n having the scum in our barns. But your complaint's on file and here we be, Abner'n me, ready to look the place over."

"Like to have ye p'int out jest where

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ye saw that dod-dangled light," said the deputy with a skeptical grin.

Joseph, who always wore a very serious expression, frowned slightly at what he deemed an undue touch of levity, and declared:

"It's as much a case of feeling as seeing. If it had only been the matter of the light I'd prob'ly kept shet, not wanting to be reckoned in with Rashe Cotton and that 'Liab Dickby. But while I ain't no nervous old woman I'll admit that place has got on my nerves. I wish the estate would tear the house down. Then, mebbe, some one would buy the land and git some good off'n it."

"Land's no good. Ain't been cultivated for fifty years. Soil's poor. Can't raise nothing but bushes and briars," grunted the sheriff. "Hop in and we'll be going. I've got to git back to my office."

Joseph climbed into the buckboard, and as they drove down the road he informed them:

"I've seen the light since I complained. Seen it two nights ago. I'd been looking after a cow—critter had strayed—and was stumbling my way home in the dark and was just topping Pugsley Hill when I seen it on the second floor."

"Moon shining on a winder," said the sheriff.

"No. It was dark as the inside of a cat, and there wa'n't no moon."

"Tramp lighting his pipe," suggested the deputy.

"Of course I ain't any proof what it was." Joseph shook his head. "I just seen the light appear in one of the upper winders. But it stayed there a lot longer'n a man would take to light a pipe. And it was too bright to be that. It was a real, room-filling light. I wa'n't thinking about the house, so it couldn't be my 'magination."

"Well, well, we know you ain't no fool," curtly admitted the sheriff. "But if you seen a light it must 'a' been a tramp. Anyway, we'll look the place over."

"Two nights ago, eh?" mused the deputy. "Say, it was th' next mornin' that 'Liab Dickby told me he heard somethin' howlin' out this way the night before—same night ye seen the light. Said he believed it was a dawg, only it sounded too spooky for that."

"'Liab Dickby is a worthless cuss," said Joseph sternly. "All he does is to fish and hunt and hit a bottle when he can git one. I wanted him to work for me and he had the nerve to say he didn't have time."

"Rashe Cotton's off the same piece," agreed the sheriff. "Lawd, how them two fellers hate each other. I forgit which one stole the other's rum." And forgetting his bad humor he fell to chuckling.

"I hated like sin to say anything after those two got to yapping," observed Joseph morosely. "Seems as if I was off the same stripe with them."

The deputy had an inspiration.

"Say, wonder if them two made the light ye seen?" he cried.

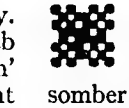
"They're in th' woods so much they may be using th' old place to camp in."

"But they ain't friends," demurred the sheriff. "Either one alone might do it to keep the boys away if he's hid any licker 'round the premises."

"Either one could stay there and know he's welcome for all we care. There isn't any need for either to do any funny business," said Joseph. "If the estate would sell the place at a low figger I might be tempted to buy it and use it for pasture."

In its prime the Fanning mansion had been a substantial landmark. Built stanchly of hand-hewed timbers it had resisted the weather for nearly a century. Marauding boys of former generations had broken all the windows, and the roof sagged in spots. But the original timbers still defied the elements. Ever since it was abandoned during the Civil War nature had endeavored to reclaim the fields and had pushed bush and sapling growths close to the walls.

Beyond transient occupations by vagabonds, or visits from boys questing for adventure, it remained lone and deserted, a gloomy monument to the past. The last of the Fannings had never seen the property, and beyond remitting his check for taxes never displayed any interest in it.



THE sheriff reined in before the stone door-step and for a few moments stared in silence at the somber structure. The encroaching growth hushed the light breeze and there was a grave-like atmosphere about the premises. The sheriff was a practical man, yet Joseph's recital about the strange lights had subconsciously registered. Of a sudden the sheriff decided the place was not

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like the common run of abandoned houses but possessed an unwholesome personality. That something of the same notion had found room in the deputy's simple mind was evidenced when he blurted out—

"Bully place for a murder."

"What rot you talking, Abner?" querulously rebuked the sheriff. "It's the most unlikely place for a murder you could pick in a hundred years. First place, you'd never find any one here to murder, and if you did what would you gain by it?"

"Ye don't have to make it so danged personal," gruffly reminded the deputy. "I was only foolin', anyway. Well, be we goin' in?" The last as the sheriff held back.

"We come a-purpose," was the tart response. And hitching the horses to a gray birch the sheriff felt of the revolver in his hip-pocket and walked to the door.

As he advanced, his knee forcing the door open, it swung back with startling abruptness almost as if some one inside had opened it. The sheriff gave a little jump, then detecting the deputy's amused grin he grew angry, and wheeling on Joseph bruskly demanded—

"Now just where did you see this mysterious light you've been bleating about?"

Joseph pointed up the dust-littered stairway.

"Second floor, about what would be the middle room," he whispered.

The sheriff noisily stamped up the stairs and led the way through several apartments. Finally he halted and ironically remarked:

"Well, I don't see no signs of any one having been here. No matches, lamps nor lanterns. Nothing but dirt and clutter."

The deputy surveyed the dilapidated walls, leprous with their missing patches of paper and plaster, then fell to studying the floor. Near the door leading into the ell he discerned something that elicited a shrill whistle.

"Shet up that racket!" commanded the sheriff. "Want to wake the dead?"

The floor was carpeted with débris from the ceiling, but there was a space near the threshold that was covered only with dust. The deputy pointed to this little area, and turned wide-eyed to his chief for an explanation.

"Now, now, Abner; what you fussed up about?" protested the sheriff.

Joseph saw it and drew back.

"It's a track!" he muttered hoarsely.

"It's one of ours. We just come in through there," snapped the sheriff.

"But it's made by a bare foot," whispered Joseph.

"That's what!" excitedly exclaimed the deputy.

The sheriff adjusted his spectacles and was compelled to admit that a naked foot had left the impression. He accounted for it by saying:

"Left by some of the youngsters who come here. There ain't no wild men of the woods hereabouts."

"Too far from the village for them to come often," muttered Joseph, eying the track uneasily. "And since this talk they ain't shown any hankering to play 'round here."

"It's fresh made," added the deputy, not intending to permit the sheriff to belittle his exclusive discovery. "An' it's too big for a boy's foot."

"It's the track of a bare foot. Let it go at that," said the sheriff. "Now what?"

"If there was any counterfeiters 'round here they wouldn't use these rooms, but would hide in the cellar or attic," timidly suggested Joseph.

"Doggone it! This is something new, ain't it?" wrathfully cried the sheriff, fishing out his gun. "You've never yipped a word about suspecting counterfeiters. When I go after counterfeiters I want to go loaded. I'll take a posse with me. They're dangerous as sin. What makes you think there's counterfeiters 'round here?"

"I ain't said I thought it," hastily defended Joseph. "But if desperate characters do come here and stop they'd almost sure to be counterfeiters. They wouldn't come here to steal or do mischief, as there ain't nothing to steal or damage. But the lights was shown by accident or on purpose to keep folks away."

"I don't know about this," the sheriff mumbled. "If I'd known it was to be a hunt for real, desperate law-breakers, reckless devils like counterfeiters, I'd 'a' sworn in a few extry deputies."

"If there was any here when we come I reckon they've heard enough to take th' tip an' skip out," said the deputy, producing the mate to the sheriff's gun. "Anyway, we can take a look at the attic."

"Oh, we'll visit the attic all right. They can't scare me," growled the sheriff,

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reluctantly turning back to the front hall. "But Stephen Joseph hadn't no right to go off half-cocked to the town authorities. If he suspected counterfeiters he oughter said that in partic'lar."

"Ye see, Steve," hoarsely whispered the deputy, "when ye give infermation ye oughter tell everything. Ye never made even a yip about th' light ye seen two nights ago. We allowed it couldn't be anything more serious than a tramp case. It's only by accident that we're armed."

"Keep quiet now," loudly called out the sheriff as he halted before the door opening on to the attic stairs.

For nearly a minute he stood with ear against the door, then banged it open and peered up the gloomy stairs. All was quiet above, and with gun raised before him he slowly ascended, the deputy and Joseph at his heels.

The musty air, baked hot by the sun, was repellent. Even the least imaginative might fancy secrets were being whispered down the narrow stairway by dead voices. The sheriff halted on the top stair and blinked at the dusk filling the place. Some distance away the gloom was accentuated, rather than relieved, by a patch of sunlight streaming through a broken skylight. It formed a sharply defined splotch on the ancient flooring.

"I don't see no secret doors. Everything is wide open. Bare's a hound's tooth. Just a common, every-day attic," commented the sheriff, his intended sarcasm being impaired by a tremulous quality of his voice. "I s'pose, Mister Joseph, that after we've prowled through that cellar and got covered with cobwebs and found nothing you'll go home and sleep more sound."

"I certainly am glad you don't find nothing," retorted Joseph. "But there was that foot-track, and I certainly seen the lights."

"Wait a minute!" gasped the deputy, each word coming with a jolt.

"What'n hen is the matter with you?" irritably cried the sheriff.

The deputy rubbed his eyes and leaned forward, and managed to choke out:

"The sunlight! It moves!"

"You dinged idiot! Of course it moves. Don't the sun move? Does a shadder stick in one place? When the sun crawls higher that patch of light naturally shifts 'round——"

He ceased speaking and made a queer clucking noise in his throat. Joseph clawed at the deputy's arm. The spot of light was touching something alien to the general decay of the place, something it was trying to salvage from the shadows.

"Gorrymighty!" yelped the deputy, grabbing the sheriff by the shoulder. "It's a hand!"

The sheriff's beard twitched and moved, but his lips uttered no sound. For a count of fifteen the three rigidly gaped at the thing. It was a hand, and now the watchers believed they could make out a shape in the outer darkness.

"Murder!" yelled the sheriff, pushing between the two and bolting down the stairs.

He did not halt till he burst through the front door. Close behind him came Joseph, ghastly of face and eyes gleaming. The deputy was a bit tardy in joining them, and when he did appear his countenance was heavy with tragic news. In a scarcely audible voice he informed:

"It's Rashe Cotton! I went near enough to see the face."

"Into the buckboard! You didn't ought to go near the body till the coroner's seen it!" barked the sheriff, jumping into the seat and gathering up the reins.

The deputy paused long enough to untie the horses from the birch, then piled in, babbling:

"Rashe an' Dickby went gunnin' three days ago. Rashe started off alone—Dickby asked for him at the store—then took his gun——"

"You didn't ought to talk till they hold the inquest," broke in the sheriff as he urged his horses down the rough road. "The coroner's jury will give the verdict."

"I ain't sayin' nothin' but what every one in Paley knows," retorted the deputy. "It ain't like givin' away a lodge secret. Rashe an' Dickby once was friends. Then they quarreled. Then one went huntin' right after t'other went huntin'—an' Rashe is found kilt!"

"That don't prove that Dickby killed him," exclaimed Joseph between bumps. "How do you know he's dead? He may be sleeping off a drunk, or something."

"It's something," assured the deputy with a shudder. "I seen the hurt on his head. Rashe Cotton's deader then a mack'rel."

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"The coroner will draw a jury and have Dickby tell where he's been the last three days," said the sheriff. "He's prob'ly done it, but it's enough for us to know murder's been done."

As he finished there sounded a long, drawn-out howl from the woods back of the old house. There was something so unnerving in the sudden obtrusion, something so ominous and sinister in the abrupt disturbance of the countryside's serenity, that the three heads, as one, jerked about and glared back.

"The devil!" shivered the sheriff.

"A dog!" faintly corrected the deputy.

LEAVING Joseph at his farm the officers rushed to the village and entered the main street at a mad gallop. Never in the history of Paley's shrievalty had an incumbent had such an opportunity to profit by the dramatic. Already the sheriff figured the case guaranteed his reelection. The dusty thoroughfare was empty. Even the store verandas lacked their usual loungers and only the dogs drowsed in the hot sun.

But the rattle and bumping of the swaying buckboard and the *clickety-click* of the pounding hoofs, supplemented by the incoherent voice of the sheriff, soon brought plenty of life into evidence. The stores spewed forth men, while women hung from windows and shrilly demanded to know where the fire was.

The sheriff was too wise to linger in the wings when the center of the stage awaited his coming. His goal was the tarnished sign advertising the office of Dr. Vance, the coroner. With a fine rattle the buckboard came to halt before the office and the reins were thrust into the deputy's hands. But the deputy had no notion of relinquishing his equity in the sensation, and turning the panting steeds over to a dazed tradesman he pounded after his chief.

The clamor of their arrival had aroused the coroner from his midday nap in the worn operating-chair. He staggered to his feet and stared stupidly at the flushed faces and gesticulating hands.

"Stop it!" he commanded. "Who's hurt? What's up?"

"Rashe Cotton's foully murdered!" cried the sheriff.

"I 'dentified the body," chimed in the deputy.

By degrees the truth was drawn from the flustrated couple, and, thoroughly awake, the coroner commenced crowding instruments into a black bag. By this time a small mob was besieging the office, and when the coroner and the officers emerged they found every male in town who was not bed-ridden awaiting information.

The coroner took command.

"Get a wagon to fetch home the remains," he directed. "Men, murder has been committed at the old Fanning house. Some of you had better follow us to view the premises. The jury ought to know what the place and surroundings look like."

With that he climbed in with the sheriff and the deputy.

"Rashe Cotton's killed in the Fanning house. I just found the body," called out the sheriff before clucking to his horses.

The deputy leaned over the wheel and shouted:

"I 'dentified him. Git rigs an' come along."

"That death trap oughter be tore down!" bawled an excited citizen.

Away raced the buckboard, the horses being urged to top speed, as though there was a chance of bringing the unfortunate Mr. Cotton back to life. Behind streamed the citizens afoot, ahorseback and in vehicles. It was practically an exodus of the male inhabitants of the village. In passing the Joseph farm the sheriff slowed down for Joseph to swing on behind.

"Heard a gunshot after you dropped me here," announced Joseph. "Come from up there."

Never, even in the heyday of its generous hospitality, did the Fanning mansion see its premises invaded by such numbers. As the villagers followed the buckboard into the opening before the front door they became strangely silent, however. The taint of murder hung heavy on the humid air. After the buckboard came to a halt the officials jumped to the ground, then stood and waited. At last the sheriff spoke up, saying—

"Gen'l'men, we all seem to be here, and if you'll form in twos we'll proceed to go up and view the remains."

"Wait a minute! Here comes another," said the deputy.

Heads were turned to behold a nondescript figure coming through the bushes. A glance was sufficient to recognize the tall,

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lanky figure of Eliab Dickby. He had been hunting as shown by the gun carried in the hollow of his left arm. His simple face betrayed surprise and alarm as he surveyed the gathering and felt the impact of the silent scrutiny.

"Good day, gents," he timidly saluted. Then uneasily. "What's up?"

The sheriff nudged the coroner as he replied:

"We found something, 'Liab. We was waiting for you to go with us to see it."

Dickby's uneasiness increased. He suspected a trap. With a furtive glance at the sheriff he addressed the citizens, explaining:

"Been out gunnin'. Heard a dawg howlin' an' tried to find him. Heard a gun shot off, too. What sort of a contraption ye found?"

"Mister Joseph also heard a gun," significantly remarked the sheriff. "It ain't happened you've been shooting yours?"

"Fired at a fox this mornin'—early."

"I see. S'pose you fall in here alongside Abner. And I reckon you can leave your gun down here."

Dickby placed his gun one side and shuffled forward. The sheriff gave the word and the *clump-clump* of heavy feet resounded through the old shell, stirring up the dust and shaking a shrapnel shower of plaster from walls and ceiling. As the silent procession reached the upper hall the sheriff cleared his throat and asked Dickby—

"By the way, 'Liab, you ain't seen anything of Rashe Cotton in your roamings, have you?"

"Ain't seen hide nor hair of him. Funny, too; for he told me to meet him here."

A galvanic shock ran through the line as it halted. The coroner rested a hand on the attic door and said—

"Thought you'n Rashe weren't on good terms?"

Dickby scuffed his feet and glanced about like a wild thing trapped, and eagerly explained:

"Oh, we made that up. We both let on that our bad feelin's was jest so much foolishness. Why, we was such good friends he told me if I'd meet him here he'd show me somethin' that would mean a bar'el of money for both of us. Yes, siree! Them was his 'zact words."

The coroner clinched his reputation for grisly repartee for all time by saying—

"You'll find that Mister Cotton has kept his appointment." And with that he opened the door and led the way up the narrow stairs.

"Just over beyond the skylight," muttered the sheriff, standing aside at the head of the stairs and pointing.

The coroner squinted his eyes. The heavy breathing of the men cramped up on the stairs testified to the general high tension of nerves. Like a thunder clap came the deputy's excited yell:

"Good Lawd! It's gone!"

There ensued a mad scramble down the attic, and those in the lead told those behind—

"There ain't nothing here."

Murmurs rose and grew into disconnected ejaculations. Then complete sentences emerged from the babel.

"What's this mean? Some kind of a game to take us from our homes and work?" protested the blacksmith.

That he registered the indignation and disappointment of all was proven by the hoarse approval backing his query.

"The body was right here," faltered the sheriff, glaring incredulously at the floor. "Abner seen it; so did Steve Joseph. I s'posed they'd look after the details while I got my hosses ready to carry the word to town."

"I went down-stairs with you," reminded Joseph. "But I seen the body."

The deputy realized the responsibility had shifted to his shoulders, and solemnly averred:

"I come over here an' seen it was Rashe. There was a wound in his head an' he was dead."

Dickby raised a frightened squawl. The coroner kneeled and examined the floor as closely as the uncertain light permitted. Then rising and dusting his knees he tersely informed:

"Must have been a superficial wound. No blood on the floor."

"Find a man sleeping off a drunk, and because he's got a bump on his head the whole neighborhood is thrown into a uproar!" disgustedly cried the blacksmith.

Dickby, beginning to understand the situation and his relation to it, eagerly broke in.

"That dawg howlin' sounded some like Rashe's dawg. Only he howled different. Then I heard a shot."

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"Cotton woke up, took his gun, whistled to his dog and went hunting," sneered the blacksmith. "And out of all this hullabaloo we know we've come six miles to do our duty and have wasted our time."

"I'm sorry it turns out like this," regretted the sheriff. Then fearing his words sounded gruesome, he added: "I'm sorry I didn't 'vestigate the body myself. But I s'posed Abner would do the ordinary thing."

"I done the ordinary thing," hotly defended the deputy. "How many murders have we 'vestigated, anyhow? Not one. The minute I seen that hand a-croppin' out into the sunlight ye beat it downstairs. Was I goin' linger 'round here till after ye driv off, leavin' me six miles from home? Not on yer life! I come to this spot an' looked down on Rashe Cotton. It wa'n't no bump on his head. Whole side caved in. He was deader'n a mack'rel."

DERISIVE laughter greeted this assertion. The sheriff, sensing a change to escape a political flareback, coldly informed:

"You've made a bungle, Abner Ham. You've gummed this affair pretty bad. I depended on you. If it happens again I shall have to ask for your badge."

"Is that so?" angrily retorted the deputy. "Ye just listen to me. Rashe Cotton's been murdered. I'll prove it afore I git done; an' then I'll beat ye for sheriff next Fall."

This sportsmanlike challenge tickled the fancy of the crowd, and good-natured endorsement was showered upon the speaker.

"Prove what you promise and we'll make you sheriff," yelled a citizen.

The deputy straightened, a shrewd light gleaming in his eyes, and clapping his hand on Dickby's shoulder he cried:

"I'll make a beginnin' now. I give 'Liab Dickby into custerday on th' charge of murder. By his own tell he was to meet Cotton here. I can swear I seen Cotton mortally kilt. I charge 'Liab Dickby with killin' Rashe Cotton, his enemy, of hidin' th' body here, of comin' an' sneakin' it away while we was gone to th' village for help.

"I reckon th' dawg we heard was Cotton's dawg, and I reckon th' shot we heard was from Dickby's gun when th' dawg come upon him totin' th' dead body to another hidin'-place!"

This spirited avowal and the logic of the reasoning left the crowd breathless for a moment. Even the coroner nodded in approval. Then the blacksmith loudly cried—

"That sounds like business!"

"Makes sense, too," bawled another.

"You'd better go slow in asking for that badge, Sheriff," coldly cautioned the coroner.

At this juncture Dickby flopped on his knees and frantically began:

"Gents—good, kind neighbors—I never done for Rashe Cotton. Long ago we had a quarrel over licker—I'll sign th' pledge an' never touch another drop! A week ago he come to me, Rashe did. He 'lowed our ways of livin' was the same. He 'lowed we oughter be together like we uster. He said the town didn't have no use for us. He cussed the town somethin' cruel, gents an' neighbors. We made it up. He told me to meet him here two nights ago. Said he had a secret that would make us rich. Said he bet we'd make five hundred dollars apiece out of it.

"Gents an' neighbors, I come that night—two nights ago. Dear neighbors, believe me, I seen a light in this house an' was skeered of ha'nts an' went back into th' woods. Then I thought mebbe it was old Rashe in here an' what a fool I'd been. An' I come back an' called Rashe by name. The house was dark an' he didn't answer. I heard a dawg howl off in th' woods. It sounded like Rashe's dawg, only it was different.

Now, believe me, dear neighbors, when I say I chased arter it, thinkin' to find old Rashe. I didn't find him nor th' dawg. Since then I've been ramshacklin' through th' woods hopin' to meet up with him. Dear neighbors, that's the truth, an' it's Gawd's truth. An' now that ye believe me jest let me have my rifle back an' I'll clear out for good."

"Git up an' come along," sternly commanded the deputy.

"That's the talk," gruffly approved the blacksmith; and the others gave the same verdict.

Joseph whispered a word in the deputy's ear. Abner nodded, and as the retreat reached the hall he called a halt, saying:

"The track of a bare foot was found by

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me in one of these rooms. I'll ask th' prisoner to take off his shoe so we can set his foot on that track."

Dickby at this broke down completely, and sobbed:

"O, Lawd! It's my track. Dear neighbors, I forgot to tell it. I did come here, an' in the broad daylight I clumbed into a winder of this house. I took off my shoes to make no noise. But I never went near the attic. That's the truth, the whole truth, an' it's the Lawd's truth, too."

This astounding confession left the crowd speechless till the coroner inquired:

"Why did you come here? Did you come to take Cotton's body away?"

"No, no," whimpered Dickby. "I wa'n't thinkin' of no dead bodies. I opined Rashe had found some money, or silver, hid here an' planned to let me in on it an' then changed his mind. I hated to come in here like sin, but I done it to see if I could find any of th' fortune he'd promised me."

"I reckon that cooks his goose," said the deputy, with a triumphant glance at the downcast sheriff.

The sheriff, however, did not propose to lose his office without a fight.

"You can't scurcely prove murder till you find a murdered body," he reminded.

"That's right," agreed the coroner. "S'long as no one seen the crime committed we can only hold this man on suspicion for a while. Meantime we must search for the body."

FOR two weeks the deputy sought some trace of the missing Cotton. There was no doubt in the minds of the majority of the citizens but that Cotton was dead and that Eliab Dickby was his slayer. The mystery attending the case and the history of the ancient house carried the story East on the Associated Press wires. One big metropolitan sheet printed a double-page Sunday special, playing up the old mansion as a "house of mystery," and including in its display of pictures a likeness of the owner, then a resident of New York.

The last of the Fannings resented the notoriety bestowed on his property, and in an interview denied that the home of his fathers was ever connected with the gruesome before. He also declared he had never seen the property and never expected to.

"The sheriff might buy it to have as a monument to his last case," facetiously remarked the deputy to a group in the post-office.

"Every one 'round here's land poor," said the postmaster. "It's wurthless. No one would take it as a gift if he had to pay the taxes."

"Not so bad as that," slowly corrected Stephen Joseph. "It would take time to bring it under cultivation, but for pasture land it wouldn't be bad."

"Too many bushes," grunted the blacksmith.

"Put in goats and they'd clean it up smooth's a hound's tooth," shrewdly replied Joseph.

"As the law can't keep 'Liab Dickby in jail much longer Fanning might make him a present of it," was one laughing suggestion.

The deputy frowned. His failure to find the body of the supposed victim worried him. The sheriff was sitting tight, hoping the case would fizzle. Unless Cotton's death was established as a fact the very townsmen who had applauded the arrest of the suspect would be the first to complain of premature action and the unnecessary expense to the county. The grand jury would be convened in another week and Dickby must be indicted or set free.

"I'm goin' to make one everlastin' try," promised the deputy. "I'm sure it ain't in or near the house, but it's 'round there somewheres."

Doubtless it was fear of the grand jury action that dispelled Dickby's lethargy that night, or else the sheriff was unusually careless. He escaped before sunrise. The deputy immediately organized a posse and scoured the country for the fugitives. The sheriff did not exert himself overmuch, as he believed his subordinate's chances of being elected sheriff were gone a-glimmering unless the accused was promptly recaptured.

"Ye must 'a' been asleep to let him git them keys," complained the deputy after a day's wasted efforts.

"That'll do nicely for you, Abner Ham. I'm still sheriff," warned the sheriff. "I cal'late it's a good thing for your repertation that he skun out. If the grand jury didn't indict him you'd be a laffing-stock. If it does indict him and he was here you'd be up a tree to prove a case."

"I'll git dawgs an' catch him," growled the deputy. "Once I've got him back I'll find that body."

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The sheriff smiled. Dogs were procured and put on the trail. Perhaps it was because there were no man-trailers in the county, or, and this very likely, because of Dickby's strong friendship with all dogs, that this endeavor also came to nothing. Some of the canines running free may have overtaken Dickby. If so, they greeted him amiably and leisurely returned home.

The community viewed the situation with keenest interest. The prize was the shrievalty, with the determined deputy pitted against the woodcraft and shifty tricks of Dickby. Both chief and subordinate were unmercifully bantered at the evening meetings.

However, there was one who refused to consider the matter in the light of an entertainment. Inasmuch as he believed Dickby would revisit the scene of his crime and would seize the first opportunity to take revenge Stephen Joseph warned the authorities that he feared for his buildings. After much threatening and haggling over terms the village placed a night watchman on the Joseph farm to guard against incendiary fires.

It was during this flare of excitement that a stranger arrived in Paley. He registered as "Roscoe Bland, New York City," and announced that as Mr. Fanning's representative he was empowered to dispose of the Fanning estate to the highest bidder. His hair was snow-white but his face was boyishly fresh and smooth. The villagers were unable to decide whether he was an old man, retaining the adolescence of youth; or a young man, prematurely stamped by age. He was not given to conversation and briefly informed the frequenters of the hotel office that all bids for the property could privately be presented to him in Room 14.

The loungers resented this species of seclusion; preferring that the matter of sale be publicly discussed in the office. During the first day there was quite a run on Room 14 by the merely curious. These invariably remained but a few minutes, and on coming down-stairs brought very red faces with them and a venomous characterization of all city chaps. This weeding-out process left the postmaster, Joseph and the blacksmith as possible purchasers.

"It's between the estate and me—private business," was the blacksmith's brusk answer when anxiously questioned regarding his interview.

The postmaster, more politic, because of politics, smiled and "allowed" he was not very keen to obtain the waste of bush-grown fields, but would buy to oblige the last descendant of an old and honored Paley family, providing the price was right. Joseph frankly repeated what he had told the sheriff on the trip to the Fanning house—that he would give five hundred dollars and not a cent more.

"And that's what I've told Mr. Bland," he added. "It's worth a little more to me then to any one else because it joins my north pasture. If I didn't live where I do I wouldn't take it as a gift."

"You may find some treasure in the old house when you come to tear it down," the hotelkeeper suggested.

"If I buy it, the estate is welcome to all the treasure if it'll tear down and remove that old ruin," was the scornful reply. "Or you fellers can git up a tearing-down-bee and divide up all you find."

This offer was hailed with delight.

On the third day of Mr. Bland's stay in town he announced his desire to view the property before closing with Joseph's offer. The sheriff, desiring to withdraw the deputy from pursuit of Dickby, feigned business activities and ordered his subordinate to escort Mr. Bland over the ground.

Abner gritted his teeth in helpless rage and reported with the official buckboard. His greeting to Mr. Bland was sullen, and for several miles he refused to enter conversation beyond a curt monosyllable. After they had passed the Joseph farm and Mr. Bland had called a cheery greeting to the farmer he ceased to be the dry, cold gentleman of the tavern and evolved into a boon companion, and unstintedly praised Abner for his work on the homicide.

The deputy thawed rapidly, and morosely replied:

What good does it do, now that doggone Dickby has lit out? Never had a man break jail afore. I snum, but the sheriff must 'a' give him the keys and showed him which ones to use!"

"Miles away by this time," murmured Mr. Bland.

The deputy did not believe this.

"When he gets out of the woods he's simple-minded. In the woods he's a reg'lar squirrel. He's never been far from Paley in his life. He might think he'd keep goin' forever when he struck out, but after

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a score of miles he'll git so homesick he'll be glad to come back even if it means hangin'. I ain't afraid he won't come back; but the cuss may hold off till after th' grand jury rises. If I hadn't come with ye today I was goin' to make a wide circle an' try to meet up with him. Sheriff wants to queer my chances at 'lection. Mebbe ye know the citizens promised to put me in as sheriff if I landed the murderer."

"They all believe Cotton was murdered?"

The deputy glared at him in deep disgust.

"Say," he finally exploded, "did ye ever know of a man killin' hisself by smashin' in his own head in an attic? He was dead when I seen him. If he kilt himself he done it on the spot. I seen him, I tell ye. He was deader'n a mackerel. Dickby done for him all right."

Mr. Bland nodded sympathetically.

"I'll go through the woods with you," he said. "It won't take long to look at the house. I'd feel sorry to think my errand is keeping an officer from doing his duty."

ALTHOUGH skeptical as to his companion's ability to follow him through the tangled wilderness surrounding the old house, the deputy was much mollified by the handsome words. Arriving at the house they repaired immediately to the attic where Mr. Bland evinced much interest in the flooring. The attic steps, shrouded in gloom, also claimed his attention, and he burned several matches in examining them.

"So many passed up and down it's impossible to find anything," he regretted. "Fine idea of that bonehead sheriff to take the whole town up here."

"Wa'n't it?" grinned the deputy in high good humor.

The rest of the building was hurriedly visited, the cellar revealing nothing but dust and dirt.

"Now we'll strike into the woods," said Mr. Bland, taking the lead in the very direction the deputy had purposed following.

But after proceeding a quarter of a mile Mr. Bland began swinging back.

"Ye've got twisted. This will fetch us out at the house," remonstrated the deputy.

Mr. Bland stunned him by placing a finger to his lips, and commanding:

"Not a sound. See to it you make no noise."

"Gorrymighty," weakly began the deputy.

"Shut up!" hissed Mr. Bland. "Stow that chatter. If I'm not mistaken you're about to have a chance to win the office of sheriff."

Eliab Dickby might have stepped from the bushes and walked arm in arm with the deputy without being discovered by that gentleman, so thoroughly was he upset by this startling change in the stranger. He followed the dapper figure, with never a glance to left or right; and Mr. Bland was moving with amazing softness. The manner in which he avoided dry twigs would have done credit to an Indian on the warpath. Often he paused to listen. At last they heard a faint noise as though some light animal was moving through the bushes ahead.

"'Liab or a rabbit," whispered the deputy, his eyes bulging.

Mr. Bland raised his hand and again bent his ear. Now he was questioning a faint gurgling noise. The deputy read the query in the elevated brows, and huskily informed:

"Hidden Brook. Ain't really hid but covered up with drift an' rubbish."

With a nod Mr. Bland made toward the murmuring waters and at last halted where he could look down into a little ravine. It was here that the brook flowed, but from up the slope it could not be seen. Logs and stumps, reinforced by litter from the overhanging trees, completely carpeted the stream.

"No good for cattle even if it was cleared out," whispered the deputy. "Water's all covered with a oily scum——"

"Sh-h-h!" warned Mr. Bland, pulling the deputy to his knes.

Something was moving down the opposite slope, keeping under cover and proceeding with the stealth of a shadow.

"Means your election as sheriff. Do as I say," whispered Mr. Bland.

The deputy gulped and nodded submission.

The newcomer now passed behind a thick fringe of undergrowth that hemmed the opposite bank, and the watchers caught the sound of something splashing in the water. Catching the deputy by the arm Mr. Bland ordered:

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"Don't move from this spot till I call you. If that chap gets away from me and starts up the bank you come in a rush."

Then to the deputy's amazement he slipped down the slope with the surefootedness of a squirrel and in three leaps had crossed the floating logs.

"Well, I'll be derned!" inwardly exploded the deputy.

But the figure behind the bushes had taken alarm at the sound of Mr. Bland's passage of the driftwood, and turned to flee up the bank. In a cat-like spring the city man overhauled him and yelled for the deputy to descend.

As Abner gained the opposite bank and came to where Mr. Bland had interrupted his prisoner's activities his gaze beheld something between the edge of the drift and the shore, something submerged in the water but showing grotesquely like a human body, and for a moment he felt weak and sick. The click of handcuffs behind the bushes revived him and he pressed on and came to a plunging halt before Mr. Bland, who was kneeling on a man's back. Mr. Bland rose and dragged his prisoner erect, and Abner stood gaping into the fear-distorted face of Stephen Joseph.

WITH such sensational doings to be discussed there was no sleep for Paley that night. The discovery that Mr. Bland was a detective, sent to town by Mr. Fanning, in itself was epochal in the history of local gossip. That Stephen Joseph was a murderer, and had made full confession, after being captured at the spot where he had concealed the body of his victim, was almost mind-shattering.

Mr. Bland, now a good fellow and perfectly free to talk, held the rapt attention of the gaping crowd as he considerately summed up:

"Your deputy sheriff had the right idea, only he got the wrong man. The gun Joseph told the sheriff he heard while the sheriff was after a posse was the gun he, himself, fired in killing the dog. He had tried to shoot the dog once before. Cotton told the truth when he told Dickby he could make them both rich; for he had discovered oil on the Fanning land. It forms an oily scum over Hidden Brook.

"He was killed right after sending a can of the oil and water, and a crudely written letter, to Mr. Fanning. Joseph had discovered oil some time ahead of Cotton. Joseph was wiser than Cotton, and planned for a big prize. He intended to buy the land for a song and reap a harvest. Poor Cotton was willing to take what Mr. Fanning would allow him.

"Now Joseph schemed to make the old house unpopular, and he played at ghost and showed lights, wishing to frighten inquisitive boys and wanderers like Cotton and Dickby from the premises. It was while doing this, and creating gossip about the place that he discovered Cotton had guessed the truth about the oily scum on the brook. He killed Cotton the night Cotton went to the house to meet Dickby to divulge his great secret.

"When Dickby came and saw a light and ran away he did not know, of course, that it was Joseph who had the light and had just finished hiding the body in the attic. But Joseph heard Dickby outside and was in hiding when he returned and called Cotton by name. This gave a new twist to his plans; instead of removing the body he would have it discovered and place the guilt on Dickby. It was known the two had been enemies.

"Now Cotton's dog was a faithful brute and he annoyed Joseph by howling about in the woods. After the sheriff's visit and the finding of the body Joseph was left at his farm by the sheriff, who was in a hurry to make town and spread the alarm. Joseph hastened back with his gun and shot the dog, and while in the woods he glimpsed Dickby. To strengthen the case against Dickby he went to the house and removed the body and thrust it under the driftwood of Hidden Brook. He concealed the body of the dog in the same place and at the same time.

"It's a curious fact, but he declares the dog has haunted him. He was ever fearing the dog would betray him by attacking him, and after the poor brute was shot he feared his body would be discovered and thus lead to the finding of the murdered man.

"When the deputy and I passed his farm I attracted his attention and called out to him, making sure he would see me going to the house. As I had hoped, he couldn't resist the temptation to spy on us. Once in the woods—this I learned from him after his arrest—he couldn't down the fear that we might stumble on to the dead dog at

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the brook. He had tied weights to the body but he was obsessed with a fear the weights had given away. It was to make sure nothing of evidence was visible along the brook that he went into the little ravine where we captured him.

"You're wondering why I should have suspected Joseph. Mr. Fanning received a letter offering five hundred dollars for what commonly was supposed to be worthless land. Had the can of oily water and Cotton's letter failed to arrive Mr. Fanning would have accepted the offer. But believing oil had been discovered he suspected Joseph was trying a game. Then came the murder and he naturally wondered if Joseph knew anything about that. So he sent me here to look into the matter. The rest you know."

As he ceased speaking the blacksmith blurted out—

"Say, be you a detective?"

"I be," was the grave reply. "Your deputy sheriff is a good detective, too. He'll make a good sheriff."

THE ex-sheriff humbly accosted Sheriff Ham, lamenting—

"It won't seem like living not to be working with you, Abner."

Sheriff Ham eyed him stolidly for a moment, then smiled whimsically, and announced:

"I reckon ye'd do for a deputy, an' that would let ye out. An' if we swap badges it'll save me buyin' one."

Without a word the former sheriff unfastened his insignia of office and exchanged it for a simple, plain affair, marked, "Dep. Sheriff." Then he informed—

"Sheriff Ham, I'm ready for business, civil or murder cases."

THE LAST BUFFALO

BY WILLIAM FRANCIS HOOKER

WHILE it is not susceptible of positive proof, and I would hesitate to say that the crow-bait I saw limping painfully along a grass-grown trail that had been trod by generation upon generation of his sires, I solemnly believe this poor old blind and mangy bull buffalo was the very last of the tens of thousands that covered the ranges of Kansas and Nebraska. It was in 1879, and not a mile from Tracy Station on the Union Pacific just west of Sidney, Nebraska. Our outfit had stopped for a noon bite, and we were discussing the pros and cons of our calling—the Spring rounding-up of our herds and the apportionment between us of the mavericks.

"What the devil do you call that?" shouted "Slim" Johnson as he pointed to a small rise in the flat country in the direction of the South Platte. "If it ain't a buffalo I'm crazy."

He was neither crazy nor mistaken, for in less than five minutes a dozen of us without mounting a cayuse had sped to the slowly moving object.

"Poor old boy!" said "Bowleg" Brown. "Where have you been the last year or two that some lavender-legged skunk from east of the Missouri didn't get you for your rotten hide?"

"Yes," added "Reddy" Watson, "and he's blind as a bat, too, part of his hide has been tanned, and he carries the gore marks of a thousand battles. Gad, but he's a veteran!"

If this buffalo wasn't the last he was at least one of the last of his race that ranged freely on the Western plains. Originally, no doubt, he had been driven out of his dwindling herd by his mates, for this was the habit of the buffalo—cripples had to go—for the natural antipathy against a sick or lame mate was as great among them as it is among cattle and horses.

He knew we stood beside him, and he stood stock still with his great nose an inch from the ground and switched his stumpy tail industriously in a futile effort to drive away the flies that swarmed at will upon his back and out of reach.

"Kill him? Not by a —— sight," said Bowleg. "Leave that to some one from the zone of civilization," and the vote was unanimous.

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THREE OPALS

A Complete Novelette

BY

Octavus Roy Cohen

Author of "To Escape," "The Burden of Hate," etc.

THE single street of Karnak was a river of mud. The rain, which had been falling since early in the previous afternoon, battered viciously against the crude frame structures of the dozen general stores and the two score residences of the little South Carolina town.

To the east the pine-serried skyline of Hell Hole Swamp melted into the gray pall, and at the battered depot the engine of the northbound local freight coughed despondently about its task of picking up two cars and dropping three.

There was no sign of life about the sodden little town, unless one chose to count old Uncle Jerry Zacharias who hobbled across the muddy expanse which separated Simpson's drug-store and the post-office, to mutter sagely, as he scraped the sticky mud from his leaky shoes—

"B'lieve me, Marse Jamie, when it rains in dis yere town it sure do rain wet!"

The eastern boundary of the little town's civic center is marked by the twin tracks of the Atlantic Coastline Railroad; the western boundary is the square-jointed, unimaginative little building, on the false front of which is inscribed—with all the flourishes of a tramp painter's art—"Traders' Bank of Karnak." The Traders' Bank is Karnak's one financial institution, it vies with Simpson's drug-store as a center of gossip. But today it was deserted save for Joshua Latimer, the thin-faced cashier; and Judith Avery, his teller and general clerk.

Somehow these twain had braved the storm, however little business they might have expected. Latimer had been first on hand, rather proud of the fact that his new and roomy car had negotiated the horrible roads which owners of a lesser brand of automobile boasted could be traveled by none save their own species.

Judith had come from her home two miles up the road on the broad back of Caramel, the family's best carriage horse. She had entered the bank with the water pouring in little rivulets from her storm-cap and mackintosh. Her greetings to the rather gloomy cashier had been as bright as if the sun were ashine out-of-doors, and she had plunged into her books.

Judith would have come anyway; it was not her nature to shirk duty because of weather pranks, but today there was real work to be done. On the previous afternoon the Traders' had received a shipment of seven thousand dollars in crisp new bills of five, ten, and twenty dollar denominations. It was not often that the vault of the little bank contained that much in ready cash, and Judith realized that its receipt portended unusual work.

She had questioned Latimer about it the

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previous afternoon, but he had vouchsafed no information. That was Latimer's way. There were many who swore by him because he was tight-lipped. He imparted to the average person a sense of personal security.

The velocity of the wind increased. Judith, glancing briefly at her morning copy of the Charleston *News and Courier* noted with interest an item in the column of shipping news which gave word that hurricane warnings were flying atop the Charleston custom-house. Her one hope was that crops would not suffer too severely: the farmers thereabouts didn't seem overly elastic of spirit, they had a habit of relaxing in the face of a blow, and much of the bank's money was tied up in farm loans.

The wind howled about the corners of the little bank, and rattled viciously at the windows. Latimer, slumped in the depths of a big Morris chair in the rear office, appeared not to notice. A cash book was propped open before him. Judith shrugged. She wondered whether Latimer ever noticed anything.

Twenty yards or so westward of the Traders' a road juts off at right angles from the county highway and loses itself in the sparsely settled regions toward the north. The storm had dealt unkindly with that road; it was a stream of mud between sections of cultivated land. But, although Judith did not see at that particular minute, it was the only trade artery into, or out of Karnak which boasted any sign of life.

The sign was a touring-car of a certain popular make which slithered downward, curtains drawn tightly to protect its lone occupant against the ravages of the storm. Its hood was well covered so that the rain could not trickle in and smother the motor and its driver seemed content to make haste slowly in low gear.

The car made its way tortuously to the side of the Traders' and there it stopped. The driver alighted on the far side of the car, screened from any chance gaze. He left his motor running.

After that he worked swiftly. First he produced a black mask which covered his head, domino-fashion, to the shoulders; leaving openings only for the unnaturally bright eyes. Then he pulled a revolver from his pocket and spun the chambers tentatively, making sure that all were filled with their usual lethal contents. After which he spent several minutes of careful scrutiny into the windows of the bank. Apparently reassured, he slid quietly toward the back door. For a brief second he paused with a hand on the knob.

Suddenly the door was flung open, letting in a shriek of wind and a miniature flood of water. As quickly as that had happened, it slammed again against the storm and the revolver was trained directly at Joshua Latimer's head. The voice which came from behind the black mask was hoarse and throaty: patently disguised.

"Hands up! Quick!"

Latimer did not appear particularly perturbed. On the other hand he did not court death by reaching for the revolver which was always handy in a pigeonhole of his desk. His hands climbed slowly ceilingward and he stared fixedly at the intruder.

Judith, hearing the commotion, but not the words, stepped to the door which separated the bank proper from the private office in the rear and stifled a scream at sight of the tableau. Instantly the gun was trained on her and a voice, even more obviously disguised than that which had first menaced from behind the mask commanded:

"Hands up! You too!"

Her hands rose slowly, tremblingly. The robber worked efficiently. It was quite evident that this affair had been no matter of impulse. He pointed ostentatiously with his left hand toward the front office, his gesture enabling him to be sparing of words.

"In there! Both of you!"

Latimer rose from his seat, a self-contained and rather commanding figure. His voice was as calm and cool as though such a visit was an everyday occurrence.

"I'd advise you," he said in a conversational tone, "to end this thing right here. If you leave now I will promise you that there will be no attempt made to find out who you are. Otherwise—" and he shrugged.

A chuckle came from behind the mask and the left hand waved impatiently.

"Quick!"

Judith was staring at that left hand; staring as though fascinated. For on that left hand she had seen a ring—a woman's ring of dull gold, in which were set three little opals.

The revolver darted from one to the other

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and they made their way into the main room of the bank. The girl spoke—

"Please——"

"Shut up!" rasped the masked man, and the girl subsided with a choked little sob.

THE robber backed toward the vault, his glittering eyes never leaving the faces of the cashier and his pretty assistant. His left hand groped for the cash compartment and flung open the steel door. It clanked against the side of the vault. The hand went in unerringly and when it came out it clutched the package of currency which had been expressed the previous day by the Second National Bank of Charleston.

Judith's eyes were still trained on the three opals which glinted from the little finger of the man's left hand. Subconsciously she noticed that the package of money had been opened. The seals were broken. The robber thrust the bulky package into the bosom of his blue flannel shirt and backed toward the door. Then he motioned them to follow and they obeyed.

He continued to step backward, choosing his footing meticulously, until he reached the side door. He gave a farewell warning—

"No funny work, or I'll kill."

Judith put out a restraining hand, as though pleading with the man. Words would not come. Then the door slammed open and shut again. Through the pane she saw him make a wild jump for the little car, leap into the driver's seat—and the machine shot across the road and disappeared in a westerly direction toward the Charleston - Summerville highway. The girl crumpled on the floor, sobbing. And through her hysteria she had only one clear thought; the three opals which glowed from the ring.

She knew that ring.

It was not until after the little car had disappeared into the gray pall of the storm that Joshua Latimer gave signs of being prey to any such human emotion as fear. He sank weakly into a chair and mopped at a perspiring forehead with a silken handkerchief. The girl stared at him dumbly.

Finally he was galvanized to life. He leaped from his chair and made his way to the wall telephone—one of a country system of telephone. He spun the bell insistently; three long rings and a short one—the call of the sheriff's office.

He waited impatiently for the answering ring, then gave the signal again and again, occasionally lifting the receiver from the hook. The line was dead and unresponsive. He dashed the receiver petulantly against the wall.

"Wire's down, I guess," he snapped. "—— this storm."

He made his way to the hat-tree in the corner and clapped on his hat, then struggled into his coat. Finally he turned his eyes on the huddled figure of the girl.

"What's the matter? Why don't you say something?"

Her body shook convulsively

"Got you, eh? Well, I don't blame you. Better brace up. Hysteria never helped a situation like this."

His hand found the knob of the door and the girl was on her feet.

"Where are you going?"

"Sheriff's office." His narrow-lidded eyes bored down at her from his thin, almost ascetic face. "Why?"

"Nothing—nothing—only I——"

He stepped toward her.

"You what?"

"Nothing, I tell you." She faced him squarely, bosom rising and falling under her storm of emotion; face pallid; eyes dilated. "Go on! Quickly."

The door closed behind him and she made her way to his swivel chair. For perhaps five minutes she sat there in statue-like rigidity, staring wide-eyed and seeing nothing. The three opals. . . .

Once again the opening of the door let in a flurry of the storm and she sprang to her feet, raw nerves aquiver. It was Latimer, dripping wet. His thin lips were working nastily.

"Carbureter soaked, I guess. Car won't start."

Her voice rose shrilly above the noise of the tempest.

"Walk, then. It isn't half a mile."

Without a word Latimer turned and left the place. She watched his tall, slender figure about which the storm-coat flapped wildly, like the raiment of some misbegotten scarecrow; as he slipped and floundered toward the court-house near the depot. The head was bowed against the blast, the footing was uncertain, but Joshua Latimer plugged doggedly on, like some Nemesis.

Judith hated the man, she had always

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hated him, it seemed. And yet, in the last twenty minutes, there had been born in her a new respect for him. She had always fancied him rather less than a man; a spineless sort of a human being, narrow of soul and ocher of heart. He had faced the bank-robber bravely; there had been something contemptuous about his attitude, as though it were beneath him to fear such a man.

And yet that attitude missed tally with the chronic subservience of Latimer to those whom he had reason to fear in the workaday world. She called to mind some bit of long-forgotten philosophy relative to a man's God-given ability to rise to a crisis.

Her nervous system had been cruelly shocked. Even more so than the thoroughly businesslike robbery warranted. Through it all those three opals in the slender band of gold seared into her brain to the obliteration of all else. She knew those opals, she knew that ring.

She knew the man.

The ring was hers. More than a year previously she had given that opal ring to her fiancé. It had been put on with a bright wish for their roseate future. Later he had experienced trouble in trying to take it off, and then laughingly appropriated it. He had worn it ever since; of course he had forgotten it. One forgets rings when one has worn them for a year or so, and Davie had overlooked the fact that she would recognize it.

Yes, the ring was hers. The man who had robbed the bank was her fiancé.

And most racking of all her miseries was the stark, staring knowledge that her fiancé, the bank-robber, was the son of Sheriff John Carroll.

II

JOSHUA LATIMER broke unceremoniously into the dingy office of Sheriff John Carroll, taking off his dripping coat and flinging it without a by-your-leave over the old iron safe in the corner. His hard, gray eyes flashed toward the probate clerk, with whom the sheriff had been chatting.

"Want to see you alone, Carroll."

The squatty little probate clerk rose quickly.

"I got to be trotting along anyway," he said apologetically. "I'll leave you gentlemen alone."

"No hurry, Pete," said Carroll, genially.

"There is hurry," rasped Latimer. "I want to see Carroll alone immediately."

As the door closed behind the little man from the probate office Carroll rose ponderously from his chair; his heavily muscular figure and broad features contrasting strongly with the angular lines of his visitor. And with solitude the smile left Carroll's face. He was not a good politician; too infernally independent, said some of his friends, and "so —— honest I got to vote for him," proclaimed his bitterest enemies.

During the three years which had elapsed since Latimer's advent to Karnak there had been a deep feeling of antagonism between the blunt sheriff and the suave cashier of the Traders' Bank. It had never become too personal, which was perhaps due to the fact that the sheriff could have wrapped his tremendous arms about the skinny figure of the banker and literally have broken him in two. But it had been there—that undercurrent of distrust on the one hand and a sort of instinctive fear on the other. And whatever shallows there may have been in Latimer's nature, he was not one to hate half-way.

The sheriff threw tact to the winds.

"I don't like your manner, Latimer."

Nor did Latimer resort to the language of diplomacy.

"I don't give a —— what you like."

It was then that Carroll smiled.

"That being the case, suppose you have a seat."

Latimer seated himself, took an Invincible from his water-proof cigar-case without offering one to the sheriff, bit the end off and applied a match. Then, after puffing deeply once or twice he allowed his sharp eyes to meet those of the sheriff squarely.

"The bank has been robbed!"

Carroll's figure stiffened. The smile—such of it as had reappeared at signs of battle in Latimer's manner—was completely gone. Gone also was the indolence of manner. The man was metamorphosed from an easy-going, good-natured man into an iron officer of the law.

"When?" The question shot from between his lips with a directness and lack of circumlocution which for the second startled even laconic Latimer.

"Half-hour ago."

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"How much?"

"Seven thousand!" And then, by way of afterthought: "Cash!"

Sheriff John Carroll whistled softly.

"So-o-o! How's that?"

"How's what?"

"Seven thousand in cash?"

"Express shipment of bank-notes from the Second National of Charleston yesterday afternoon."

"Cleaned you out, eh?"

"Clean."

"Take anything else?"

"Nothing."

"Knew all about that seven thousand?"

"Evidently."

"Tell me about it."

Latimer told him, clearly, graphically, with a telling absence of adjectives, omitting no detail, coloring no fact. When he finished Sheriff Carroll eyed him keenly.

"Any suspicions?"

"None that I care to voice."

"What do you mean?"

"The man was disguised."

"Still, you may have an idea that you know who did it."

"You're entitled to your ideas, Carroll. They do not interest me."

"On the other hand," persisted Carroll tensely, "your ideas do interest me."

"I have told you that I do not care to voice my suspicions."

"You mean you refuse?"

"Just that."

Carroll rose to his feet and donned raincoat and rubber hat.

"Storm's got the telephone wires down," he vouchsafed, "but I reckon the railroad wire's working all right. Guess I'll file data with a few counties hereabouts. By the way, did you happen to notice the license number of the flivver?"

"No."

"Sorry. Coming to the depot with me?"

"I'm going back to the bank."

"You're a genial cuss, Latimer. Howsomever, I'll join you there directly."

Back to the bank Latimer plowed, whilst the sheriff made his way to the depot. In a very few minutes he had startled the operator by explicit orders to wire a certain message to the sheriffs of Charleston, Orangeburg, Berkely, Clarendon and Georgetown counties. To the myriad questions of the operator and the station agent he turned a smiling answer.

"You boys just keep your eyes peeled for that fellow and if you catch him I ain't saying but what there might be a pretty good reward."

"If any one should ask us—" hazarded the gossipy station agent.

"Talk all you please. The more publicity this thing gets the better off I'll be."

FIFTEEN minutes later the figure of Sheriff Carroll bulked in the doorway of the bank. A half-hour later he had completed his questioning of Judith—and then the official mask dropped from his face and he took her gently by the shoulder.

"This thing's kind of played thunder with my little girl, eh?"

Tears welled to the girl's eyes.

"You don't know—how much."

"There—there." He stroked her head as it nestled miserably against his coat. "S'posing you knock off work for the day and trot on over to the hotel. A cup of good strong coffee might help you a little."

She donned hat and coat without a word and together they left the bank and negotiated the heavy mud of the road to the rambling be-annexed structure which was Karnak's single hostelry. In the hallway they were met by the ample-hipped landlady and a half-dozen boarders to whom news of the daring robbery had been brought by the station agent, whose glee in being a harbinger of sensation had arisen superior to his loathing of the horrible weather.

"Have you caught him yet, Sheriff?" "Who do you suppose it is?" "Oh! Judith, wasn't it just simply terrible for you?" came the questions in rapid-fire.

Carroll waved them good-naturedly aside and commandeered the parlor.

"You folks steer an off-course for a few minutes. I want to chat with Judith here. I'll let you know everything soon as I know it."

Once in the room the girl wilted on the couch. For perhaps five minutes she stared blindly at the ceiling, then she turned on her face, and her slender body was racked with tearing sobs. Carroll soothed her as best he could—he was infinitely gentle with women—and at length she rose to a sitting posture and met his eyes squarely. There was something of the set of her own father's fighting jaw in hers as she

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gazed at him, and the sheriff—an unimaginative man not given to premonitions, experienced a vague, sinking sensation.

"As—as an employee—of the bank," she faltered, "I've got to tell you——"

"If it's something unpleasant now, my dear——"

"Unpleasant!" she laughed harshly. "Good God! If it were only that!"

"It's about the robbery?"

She nodded.

"Get it off your chest, Judith. Tell me."

"I've got to," she cried desperately. "There's nothing else to do. The responsibility must be yours. I know you would not have things otherwise—and yet——"

"I've never shirked it yet."

"It was the man who robbed the bank—he was disguised—almost."

"Almost?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—he forgot—one thing. I wish that he had not. But he did. He forgot the ring."

"What ring?" The sheriff felt suddenly ill, he was scarcely conscious of it.

Once again her eyes met his squarely.

"The man who robbed the Traders' this morning wore a girl's ring set with three opals. He wore it on the little finger of his left hand. He—he— Oh! I had to tell you."

The sheriff rose as one who had been stunned by a sudden blow. He crossed the room and placed his hand paternally on her mass of auburn hair.

"You mean—my boy?"

The head moved affirmatively beneath his big palm. The sheriff raised his left hand and brushed it across his forehead. In his eyes there had dawned the light of infinite pain.

"You wouldn't say that unless you were sure." His voice held a desperate, pleading nuance.

"No."

A long pause, and then his broken voice:

"There must be some way out, my daughter. There must be."

HE SEATED himself beside her on the couch and imprisoned her tiny trembling hand in his big, calloused palms. For a long time neither spoke; they were trying to adjust themselves to this upheaval which had wedged its way into their cosmic scheme. It was the sheriff—the officer of the law—who broke the silence; his official voice pregnant with the agony of stricken fatherhood.

"Aside from the ring—you must be brave and give me all the facts, you know—do you know of any other reason why my son should have—done this thing?"

"You mean—was he in trouble?"

"Yes."

"You knew that he had been speculating?"

Carroll shook his head.

"No," heavily. "I haven't been as much in Davie's confidence as I used to be. What sort of speculating?"

"Margins."

"And he went broke?"

"Very nearly. The stock with which he had been playing dropped heavily. He had a big margin up and he held on. The thing continued to drop and about a week ago he went to Latimer and asked him for a two-thousand-dollar bond-and-mortgage loan on the Farris tract."

"Two thousand on the Farris tract? The thing isn't worth a thousand."

"I know it and Davie knows it and Latimer knows it. But Davie explained that the security was in his signature on the bond. A personal security, as it were."

"That's what wrecks nine out of ten country banks," Carroll growled. "Of course Latimer refused?"

"No, he didn't refuse. He promised the money to Davie yesterday."

The sheriff's eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"Joshua Latimer promised to lend my son two thousand dollars on a tract of land that isn't worth half that amount?"

The girl nodded:

"It struck me as peculiar at the time, knowing how he hates you."

"It is peculiar—very. Latimer is a small man; small and mean and unscrupulous, to my way of thinking. And after he had promised?"

"Davie had promised Garrison, Gest & Company, his Charleston brokers, that he would have two thousand dollars with them by noon today. Yesterday he came in to see Latimer and was told that the shipment of cash had not arrived. Then they went into Mr. Latimer's office together and later I heard high words, although I could not distinguish what they were saying. A half hour later Davie came

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out and all I heard him say was 'I'll see you in the morning.' "

"What was his manner when he said that?"

She sighed.

"You know Davie. He is high-strung—mettlesome. They had evidently been quarreling—he just said something about 'I'll be here all right,' and then went out without even nodding to me. He didn't seem very—very happy."

"Hmm! Then what happened?"

"I went back into Mr. Latimer's office and he was scowling fiercely. I asked him what the trouble was. 'Young cub,' he growled. 'Got sore as a boil because I didn't have the money for him today. Said I was planing to throw him down. I fixed him all right.' I asked him what he meant by that and he doubled his skinny fist and slammed it on the desk: 'How do you suppose I could fix him? I told him he could go somewhere else for his money—to his father if he dared. I told him straight out he couldn't get it at the bank.' "

"So-o, Judith. What about Davie's two statements that he'd see Latimer this morning?"

"I asked Mr. Latimer," responded the girl. "He said that Davie had been nasty—threatening. That he'd said he'd come back this morning and give him—Mr. Latimer—one more chance and that if he didn't come across there'd be trouble. You see, Mr. Latimer had promised to loan Davie the money and Davie had counted on it. I don't wonder that he grew—angry—irresponsible—when Latimer turned him down at the last minute."

"If he'd had any sense," rumbled the sheriff, "he'd have known that was just what a snake like Latimer would do. It's plain as daylight; Latimer knew he had him right and saw a good chance to break him. He got the boy counting on him for the money—then laughed at him, knowing it was too late for him to get it anywhere else. There's one more chance—I'll telephone Garrison, Gest & Company."

He made his way to the depot and was plugged in with the offices of the big Charleston brokerage firm on the long-distance lines which had not been damaged by the storm. The conversation was brief and excellently camouflaged by the sheriff.

"This is Sheriff Carroll in Karnak. Did that youngster of mine get there in time to protect himself?"

There was an instant's wait between question and answer: an eon during which the sheriff was at once hot and cold. And then the reply: cool, merciless as doom itself—

"I'm glad to say that he did, sir."

Carroll tried to put lightness in his tone; to conceal the agony which was there.

"He had plenty?"

"Two thousand in cash, sir. We figured that would make him absolutely safe. The market has been breaking but it can't wipe out all that. Such a thing has never been known—"

"That's my son's affair," said Carroll somewhat curtly. "How long has he been there?"

"He's not here now. He came in a little after eleven and left about twenty minutes later in his car."

The sheriff hung up the receiver sharply, then plowed back to the hotel, oblivious to the mud into which his huge boots sank with every step. His brain was a whirling agony, there was no longer any lingering doubt as to his son's guilt. Circumstances dovetailed too perfectly. The robbery had occurred just before nine o'clock. The excitement at the bank immediately afterward, Latimer's futile efforts to start his automobile, the banker's interview with the sheriff, Carroll's inspection of the scene of the crime—all that had taken much time.

Davie could have reached Charleston easily by eleven o'clock, for the road is very bad only to the point where it joins the Charleston highway and from there on it is almost as level and smooth as a billiard table. It was not nearly noon. Undoubtedly Davie was on his way back to Karnak, the remaining five thousand dollars of his booty securely hidden.

It was characteristic of the sheriff that he suffered no doubts as to what course he must pursue. Implicit, unswerving obedience to duty was in the man's blood. If his boy had done this thing, then his boy must suffer. The course of John Carroll, sheriff, was plain. The course of John Carroll, father, was one of poisoned thorns.

THROUGH it all he found himself surprised at the attitude which Joshua Latimer had assumed. Latimer had dropped not one whit of the hostility from his manner, but now Carroll

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understood why the man had not voiced his suspicions as to the robber's identity. It was decent of the man. Carroll had never credited him with that large a soul—and in the magnanimity of his own nature, Carrol restrained an impulse to seek Latimer and apologize.

Something deterred him and he returned to the hotel where he found the girl still huddled on the sofa, and by her side a cup of steaming coffee at which she sipped in a disinterested, spiritless manner. Her eyes sought those of the sheriff and read the answer.

"It's all up," said he. "The boy reached Garrison, Gest & Company's offices at eleven o'clock. He planked down two thousand dollars in cash to cover present and future losses. He left there about 11:30. If he returned direct he ought to be here by half-past one unless a bridge has gone down somewhere."

"And you," she breathed, "what are you going to do?"

Their eyes met and held.

"There is but one thing for the sheriff to do, my daughter. Don't you understand?"

She bowed her head.

"I understand. But—oh! It's hard—bitter hard."

They held vigil together, the girl and the man who was to have been her father-in-law, awaiting the return of the boy whom both hoped would not come. It would be so much easier if he culminated his cowardice by fleeing the law. And yet—had he intended to follow that course he would not have put up the money with the Charleston brokers.

It was hard to believe—the thing was so utterly foreign to Davie's nature. He had been wild, yes, and reckless. He had done many things which his father and his sweetheart did not approve, but until this thing there had been nothing which would cause them to bow their heads in shame. He had been the very soul of honor, blessed with a moral rigidity inherited from a line of forebears with whom integrity had been a byword.

At a quarter before two he came, and he stopped his mud-plastered car before the hotel, alighted and started toward the bank across the street. The sheriff was on the veranda in a bound and had hailed his son—

"Davie—come here for a minute."

The boy was drenched but he came readily enough, mumbling an apology to the proprietress of the hotel for the water which he shed in her hallway. Carroll held open the door and motioned the young man to enter the little parlor.

Davie was a good figure of a young man, a bit above medium height and considerably more than medium breadth. The face was the face of the father, save that the jaw may not have been so intransigently square, nor his eyes quite so level. But there was the same humorous twinkle in them and the same devil-may-care swing to the shoulders.

A close student of character would have guessed that Davie had inherited his father's courage and much of his strength—much, but not all. Again the sheriff found his inmost self rebelling violently at the idea that this boy might have been guilty of the hold-up.

Davie stepped into the little parlor and stopped short at sight of the girl, who had risen and was staring at him, wide-eyed and rigid. Her eyes flashed to the little finger of his left hand. The little ring with its three opals was still there. He sensed something strange in her attitude, and questioned:

"Judith! What are you staring at?"

"That—that—ring," she faltered.

"What ring?" Then he remembered, lifted his left hand and laughed. "The one you gave me, eh? What's the matter with it?"

"Nothing— Everything——"

The boy stared at her helplessly, then glanced at his father. The senior Carroll was standing rigidly in his tracks staring from his son to Judith and from Judith back again to his son. The lad's brow corrugated to a frown.

"What's the big idea, Dad? Something wrong?"

"Yes," heavily. "Everything."

"Everything. I say—you two seem to have the willies. What's up?"

"You've been speculating, Son!"

Carroll's voice came evenly, accusingly, and the boy's face flushed. He knew that his father opposed margin speculation, had always opposed it. A hint of petulance crept into his tones.

"And what if I have? I'm more than twenty-one years of age."

"Don't you think you might have told me?"

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"No, Dad, I don't. You're so archaic in your ideas and are so bitterly opposed to anything like that——"

"But there are limits." The sheriff's voice cracked harshly across the dingy little room. Judith was staring fascinatedly first at father and then at son. "There are limits beyond which even you may not go."

Davie's shoulders went back and he met his father's gaze squarely.

"Meaning?" he asked with more than a hint of his father's independence.

"You have just returned from Charleston?"

"Yes."

"While there you visited the offices of Garrison, Gest & Company?"

"Yes; they are my brokers."

"You put up with them two thousand dollars in cash?"

"Yes."

Carroll's next question came slowly, searchingly. His every word pounded:

"Where did you get that money?"

Davie Carroll shrugged as he answered casually—never dreaming the sensation his words gave.

"Where did I get it? Joshua Latimer gave it to me this morning."

III

IN THE sheer effrontery of it fairly lifted the sheriff and Judith from their feet and her choked little cry of "Davie!" echoed from the musty walls. It was the sheriff who pulled himself together first and resumed his damning questioning; his voice low-toned, almost monotonous in its fierce relentlessness.

"You say Latimer gave you the money: when and how?"

"I met him at the bank by appointment at eight o'clock this morning where he gave me two thousand dollars on a bond and mortgage covering the Farris tract."

"A tract worth probably a thousand dollars."

"He knew that my bond was good."

"And you expect me to believe ——"

Davie crossed the room in three strides and seized his father by the shoulder in a grip which matched that of the older man for rugged strength. His voice rasped:

"Out with it, Dad. Something's wrong and you're cross-questioning me. Now tell me what's what or I'll answer no more questions. That's flat."

"How do you know something's wrong, Son?"

"I know it by your manner. I know it by the care you have used to follow my movements this morning. Now what is it?"

Again that clash of wills.

"The Traders' Bank was robbed this morning at nine o'clock, Davie. The robber got away with seven thousand dollars in currency. And he went to Charleston in an automobile."

Davie dropped back a step, hands outstretched beseechingly.

"And you mean—good God! Dad, you don't suspect me?"

"Yes, Son, I suspect you."

He whirled on Judith.

"And you?"

"I recognized you." She met the issue without faltering.

"You recognized—" He laughed harshly. "I thought you loved me."

"I do, Davie. But I recognized you and told your father."

"And you, Dad—to whom else have you voiced these absurd suspicions?"

"No one."

"Good!" There was infinite relief in the young man's tones. "Then the beans are not all spilled."

"They will know, of course," went on the sheriff evenly, "after I shall have placed you under arrest."

The boy snapped his fingers.

"No need of that. We'll trot over and see old Latimer. He'll tell you about giving me the two thousand at eight o'clock this morning, and he'll show you the bond and mortgage which we drew up in his office at the time."

A gleam of hope dawned in the eyes of the father.

"You mean that?"

"Of course," impatiently. Then he turned back to the girl. "How did it happen that you recognized me?"

She pointed to the three opals which glinted from the little finger of his left hand.

"You forgot to take that off when you disguised yourself."

"This ring—" His face turned brick-red. "I say, isn't it going a little strong to condemn me unheard? I don't know anything about the robbery; I wasn't in Karnak at nine o'clock this morning——"

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"Where were you?"

"At that particular minute, as nearly as I can recollect, I was fussing with my motor. The rain had caused me considerable trouble. Which was the reason I didn't reach Charleston until nearly eleven o'clock. But suppose we go over and see Latimer? That's the easiest method of clearing up this fool situation."

They plowed their way across to the bank, the three of them. The sheriff's head was awhirl. Try as he might he could not bring himself to see a confession of guilt in the young man's manner. He seemed outraged, indignant—anything but guilty. And yet the facts. . . .

It was Sheriff Carroll who handled matters when the four were seated in the rear room of the bank.

"Latimer, my son tells me that at eight o'clock this morning he met you here by appointment and that you gave him two thousand dollars in cash."

Latimer's eyes opened wide, and he leaped to his feet.

"What's that? That I gave him two thousand——"

"Yes. Did you?"

"Of course not. I have not seen him this morning."

Davie's jaw had dropped slowly; now his teeth came together with an audible click. He started menacingly toward Latimer.

"You mean to say——"

"I'm handling this, Son," interrupted his father.

"You're doing nothing of the kind. Do you suppose I'll sit here quietly and hear this man lie?"

His eyes bored furiously into the rat-like orbs of the tall banker; his voice was coldly menacing:

"You have completely forgotten about my appointment with you at eight o'clock this morning: about sitting at that very desk and drawing up a bond and mortgage on the Farris tract for two thousand dollars—have you forgotten that you went to the safe and broke the seals on a package of money containing—so you said—seven thousand dollars, out of which you gave me two thousand in tens and twenties?"

Latimer shrugged and turned toward the sheriff.

"I'm afraid I can not understand your son's words or his violence, Sheriff Carroll. Such a thing as he describes never took place. I don't know what to make of it."

"You lie!"

"Easy there, Son."

"Certainly if I had given him the money," continued Latimer suavely, "I should have remembered it."

Judith's voice broke in quietly:

"And the bond and mortgage—that would certainly be here."

Latimer waved toward the banking-room.

"I give you *carte blanche*, Carroll, to search. Except for my visit to your office, I haven't been outside this bank since I arrived at 8:40 this morning. If that mortgage was drawn here, as your son says, it is still here."

CARROLL was a man of few words. Followed by Judith and the irate Davie he made a thorough search of the bank's papers. At its conclusion he turned heavily toward Latimer.

"I guess you're right Latimer: there's no such instrument here."

"Of course there isn't. Do you suppose I would have forgotten."

"There's something wrong here," broke in Davie desperately. "I am not crazy. I came down here at eight o'clock and met Josh Latimer by appointment. He, himself, drew up that bond and mortgage——"

"Who witnessed it?" broke in his father.

Davie shook his head.

"No one; my signature is known and as I was anxious to get to Charleston and had to make an early start on account of the horrible condition of the road, we decided to have it witnessed and attested later."

"Rot!" broke in Latimer harshly. "I don't do business that way."

"And the robber got away with how much?" questioned the sheriff.

"Seven thousand dollars. The package came up late yesterday afternoon from the Second National Bank by Express. I put it in the safe without opening it to check up and it was that package which the robber took this morning."

"Did you know about that seven-thousand-dollar shipment, Davie?"

"I knew that there was a money shipment coming. Latimer had told me. I did not know the amount."

"Then you never have counted the money, Latimer?"

"No. The package was unopened. Miss

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Judith was here at the time of the robbery."

Davie had walked to the window and was staring out into the murk of the storm. Finally he turned, and there was a sag to his shoulders.

"I can't make head or tail to the whole miserable mess," he said dully. "What are you going to do, Dad?"

The sheriff's eyes were pain-filled.

"There's nothing for me to do, Son, except to arrest you. You—you—" his voice broke—"are under arrest."

Silence fell on the little group, silence broken only by the howling swish of the rain against the rudely constructed building and by the insistent ticking of the big clock over the vault. Sheriff Carroll, "Honest John" Carroll, had put his son under arrest for bank robbery. Judith put her handkerchief to her lips and choked back a dry, wracking sob. It was Latimer who spoke—

"I'm sorry about this, Carroll; truly I am."

The sheriff raised his eyes to those of the man whom he had never liked. Real sympathy radiated from Latimer.

"I really believe you are, Latimer." And then: "You suspected from the first?"

"I suspected—yes. But I never would have voiced my suspicions."

Davie raised his head and gazed straight into Latimer's eyes.

"You're a real humorist, Latimer," he choked. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

A half-hour later Judith sought the sheriff in his office. Davie was seated in the corner staring out at the storm—crushed.

"Mr. Carroll," reported the girl sadly, "I have just been talking to Charleston: first to the Second National and then to Garrison, Gest & Company. That shipment was made in bank-notes, and the brokers say that Davie's payment was made in notes of the Second National—new, crisp notes, of ten and twenty dollar denominations."

IV

THE sensational robbery of the Traders' Bank of Karnak with its even more sensational sequel of the arrest of Davie Carroll, shook the sleepy, stodgy little South Carolina town to its foundations.

Karnak experiences little which is calculated to arouse it from its ruck of desuetude and when something does happen, the most is made of it. The town rumbled with gossip and counter-gossip. There were many—a majority, perhaps—who frankly expressed surprise that Davie should have done this thing; but there was no one—unless perhaps it were Judith—who believed in his oft-reiterated innocence.

Davie's arrest had been excitedly telephoned into the editorial offices of the Charleston *News and Courier* and the Columbia *State* by the excited local correspondent whose greatest newspaper experience to date had been the chronicling of a citizen's sudden death or a citizeness' sudden marriage. Press association correspondents in both cities, quick to perceive the innate drama in the situation, put the story hot on their wires and it received nation-wide publicity.

For a month Davie—out on ten thousand dollars bond—remained at home. Sheriff Carroll had aged twenty years in the twenty days which had followed the robbery. Judith had visited Davie, at his home, regularly, going always from the bank with Sheriff Carroll.

Davie could not fathom her attitude.

"Why do you come here? Why do you come to see a—a crook?"

She met his eyes fearlessly.

"Because no matter what you are, Davie, and no matter what you may have done—I can not help feeling toward you as I felt—before——"

"You mean that you love me—a bank robber?" he questioned bitterly.

"Yes."

"You expect me to believe that, loving me, you were the cause of my arrest?"

"I not only expect you to believe it, Davie; I know you believe it. You can not doubt it."

"I do!" he snapped roughly.

She crossed the room and stood before him.

"Look me in the eyes and repeat that."

He did as bidden—save that instead of repeating it, he caught her to him hungrily and covered her face with kisses.

"I do love you so, girl. And I do believe that you love me—but how could you? How could you do it?"

"I knew, Davie: I recognized you, and I was an employee of the bank—a public institution."

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"But it isn't so," he denied wildly. "There's some terrible, horrible mistake!"

It was the first time he had talked since his arrest, and she led him on.

"How, Davie?"

"The whole thing. There's something fiendishly crooked about the deal. Latimer drew that bond and mortgage himself, and personally broke the seals on that packet of money and counted out the two thousand dollars. How can you say——"

"That ring, Davie," pointing to the three opals which remained on the little finger of his left hand; "you forgot to take that ring off, and I recognized it. I couldn't have helped recognizing it."

"Don't you suppose that if I had done the thing I would have known you would have recognized the ring—and removed it?"

"No," she answered in all honesty, "and for several reasons, Davie—oh, don't think, dear, that I am trying to convict you when all I am trying to do is to explain—first, you have worn that ring for more than a year without ever taking it from your finger, and in that length of time one becomes unconscious of a ring; secondly, you couldn't have gotten it off without filing it, and if you had done that it wouldn't have gone on again; thirdly, you were—we presume—bitter against Latimer for trying to trick you—too furious to think of very minor details. He had tried to ruin you financially by promising the money and then reneging——"

"But he didn't renege," the boy insisted, "he gave me the money with his own hands, and it was he who drew the mortgage."

"What became of that mortgage, Davie?"

"God knows! I don't. But that mortgage was drawn. I am not a crazy man. Do you suppose I'd come back here with any such tale as that if it were not true?"

"It seems unlikely—and yet, looking at it from the other standpoint, what would Latimer benefit by denying it? You forget, boy, that I saw the robbery committed. Look facts squarely in the face, dear; can't you see why I believe that you—that you—are guilty."

He hung his head. "I'm not blaming you, Judith. I understand. But it seems hard—when I know I'm innocent!"

Thus it had always been: a persistent denial of his guilt. His story was so simple as to be almost absurd, but in the end it began to have its effect. The sheer earnestness of the young man impressed itself on the girl. About a week after the arrest she found herself thinking:

"Suppose he is not guilty?"

Then she smiled miserably. She was positive of his guilt—the circumstances surrounding the case were too utterly conclusive. There could be no refutation of the opal ring. That had condemned first and convicted later.

As yet Davie had not been tried, but the day for the trial was drawing near. Karnak is county seat for one of the largest and poorest of the South Carolina counties. Thrice yearly court is held there: each term of court lasts one week, of which only two days are given over to the criminal docket.

As to whether he would be tried at this term of court rested with Davie. Chances were that his case would not be reached and even if it should be, a single postponement could easily be obtained. And much to his father's surprise the boy insisted that he did not want his case tried immediately.

"Why, Son?" questioned the sheriff. "Why not face the music and start in on—on your prison term?"

"That's just it," responded the boy. "I'm not guilty and every day of grace allowed me adds just that much chance. If I face a jury now I'll be convicted before I get into the dock. God knows that if both you and Judith believe me guilty the jury can not fail to convict."

Carroll placed his huge hands on the boy's shoulders and stared at him intently.

"You maintain that you are innocent?"

"Of course I'm innocent. Not that I expect you to believe it; you nor any one else."

"I'm afraid I can not believe you, boy, much as I wish to. It isn't that you oughtn't to be innocent—I can not imagine a Carroll stooping to that sort of thing. But Judith is beginning to believe in your innocence."

Davie's face lighted.

"You mean that, Dad?"

"Partly. She came to me yesterday: 'Do you know,' she said, 'that something—intuition, perhaps—tells me that Davie is telling the truth.' I'm afraid I discouraged her new-born hope. You see, she loves you very dearly, my boy, and probably her desires are father to the budding belief."

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"I don't care what's father to it," answered the junior Carroll, "if she—if any one—will believe in me hard enough, things will come right. I didn't do it, Dad; I couldn't do such a thing even if I wanted to. Won't you believe that?"

Carroll turned away.

"I'd like to, Son. But I would not believe any other man in view of the circumstances, and I can not allow myself to believe you. Although," heavily, "I'd cheerfully lay down my life to establish your innocence. But it can not be done. Your story differs so terribly from Latimer's."

"Did it ever occur to you, Dad, that Latimer lied?"

"Why?"

"I don't know!" The answer came simply. "But lie he did."

"Is it reasonable that the man would give you two thousand dollars and then deny it?"

"That's the devilish part of it: the part I can not understand, because that is exactly what he did do. Oh! I know you don't believe me—I know the jury will not believe me. But there is something more to this than you can guess. And if I knew who really did hold up the bank——"

IT WAS at that very moment that something was occurring at the bank—the sequel to a rather peculiar occurrence—which changed the aspect of the entire case.

It had to do with a stranger: a man of perhaps thirty years of age, a trifle above the average height and unusually broad of shoulder and deep of chest; a man of square jaw and level eyes, who walked into the bank and addressed himself to Judith Avery, who that day was alone in the bank during Latimer's absence on a business trip to Spartanburg.

"Good morning, Miss."

She recognized the man instantly. He had arrived in Karnak about three days before, had immediately called on Joshua Latimer and had been closeted with him for half an hour. Katie Norman, who worked as a stenographer in the office of the clerk of court and who boarded at the hotel, had long since told Judith that the stranger's name was Gardner Paisley and that he had said he would be in Karnak for "several weeks." Timber man, thought Katie.

Judith approached the teller's window.

"Good morning," she smiled cheerily. "What can I do for you?"

"Is Mr. Latimer in?"

She shook her head.

"No. He went to Spartanburg yesterday morning and will return tomorrow. He goes to Charleston on the Southern, will spend the night there and return in his car in the morning. Nothing I can do?"

"Why, yes. I wanted to open a little account: matter of convenience in cashing checks locally."

She reached for a bank-book and held the pen poised above it. "Mr.——"

"Gardner Paisley."

A minute later—

"What will your initial deposit be?"

"Oh—say, four hundred dollars."

"If it's your own check, Mr. Paisley, we'll have to accept it subject to collection. You see——"

"Needn't worry. It's cash." And he produced from an inside pocket a long, heavily stuffed wallet. From that wallet he took a sheaf of bills which he thumbed over rapidly, returning some considerable excess over four hundred dollars to the wallet. "There you are."

Save for the fact that the color fled from Judith's face and that her fingers trembled and funny little spots danced before her eyes she gave no hint of her excitement. The entry was made on the first page of the bank-book in neat characters and she handed it to him with a cheery:

"Thank you. We hope you'll see us often."

The man stared at her meaningly.

"I shall make it my business to do so," he said.

Then he left the bank.

With feverish fingers Judith seized the money Paisley had deposited. Then something like a strangled laugh broke from between her lips.

The bills were fives, tens and twenties. They were all crisp and new. And they were bank-notes of the Second National Bank of Charleston!

V

DURING the long, sleepy Summer afternoon Judith worked like an automaton, her thoughts with the stranger who had opened his account with four hundred dollars in new bank-notes.

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Under ordinary circumstances she would have felt no great interest in the man or the manner of his deposit; but coming as it did, at a time when notes of the Second National of Charleston filled her mind to the exclusion of all else, she was fairly stunned.

Without proof, almost without hope of proof; yet because of her womanly intuition, Judith knew that the man who called himself Gardner Paisley was the man who had held up the bank. And, once convinced—groundless as she admitted her suspicion to be—that he was the man, she became adroit.

She closed her books, locked the safe and spun the combination. Then she strolled over to the hotel. Paisley was seated on the veranda in the porch swing. She ostentatiously seated herself in a battered rocker near by and allowed her physical self to relax with a sigh. It was she who opened the conversation.

"Sleepy weather, isn't it?"

The man smiled.

"Very. I don't see how you stand it all day in that stuffy little bank cage."

"I have to live, you know. But it is dull. Especially when Mr. Latimer isn't there to keep me company."

"Cheerful old crab, Latimer."

"You've known him long?"

"Ten years, I guess. I knew him in Cincinnati when we were young men together. He never was anybody's little ray of sunshine."

The girl threw back her head and the laughter which she simulated rang true.

"Not Mr. Latimer. He seems at war with the world in general."

Then ensued a short pause which the man broke with a query—

"You say Latimer will return in the morning?"

"Yes. At least that's what he planned and he hasn't notified me otherwise. You were anxious to see him?"

"Ye-e-s. There's a little matter he promised to look into for me. But it'll wait." And, as she rose—"Not going, are you?"

"Yes. I must saddle up and get home to help with supper. I hope you'll drop in at the bank often while you're in town."

"I shall," smiled the man, evidently keen to the fact that he had made a personal impression on the girl, "often."

From the hotel, Judith walked swiftly to the bedraggled court-house and five minutes later was closeted with the sheriff. She leaned forward tensely, one hand on his knee, her eyes burning into his.

"You would like to establish Davie's innocence, wouldn't you?"

The man smiled sadly.

"Nothing would make me quite so happy, my girl. But I'm afraid you have become a monomaniac——"

"I have not," she insisted fiercely. "I don't know what has started me—intuition, I'd call it, but you'd laugh at that and say it was tommyrot——"

"I'd sneer at nothing you might say, Judith."

"Then listen to this—remembering that I can't prove anything yet—but you must help—I am quite sure——" Suddenly she shifted her line of attack.

"What do you know about this man, Gardner Paisley?"

Carroll was surprised.

"Not much—except that he seems to be a decent sort of chap and is apparently a friend to Josh Latimer."

"Do you remember when you first saw him?"

"No-o."

"Think carefully. Wasn't it a couple of days after the Traders' robbery?"

"Why, yes—but what is the connection?"

"This—" and she sketched briefly the visit of the man to the bank, his request for Latimer and then his deposit of four hundred dollars in notes of the Charleston Second National.

As she finished and leaned back, face flushed and eyes dancing, the sheriff whistled softly.

"You are a trump, Judith. Of course, it probably means nothing; but——"

"But it's worth working on. And I'm going to work on it. And you must help me."

Carroll waved his hand.

"You have a zealous ally, dear. Give your orders——"

"First, you must see that Paisley does not leave town. If he tries to leave have a warrant ready and arrest him on any trumped-up charge you can think of. Vagrancy, I don't care what. You can fix it readily enough, can't you?"

"Very easily."

"Tomorrow you must go to Charleston

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and as sheriff of Karnak County you must visit every bank there and find out if he has an account at any one of them. Meanwhile I shall watch his account in the Traders' to see if he cashes any save local checks. If he does, I'll notice what bank they're drawn on."

"And if he has no account in Charleston?"

"Try all the banks there: especially the Second National. Find out if they know him at all. If your search there is fruitless try the banks in Florence, Orangeburg and Columbia. Because if my suspicions are correct and he has not kept the cash in his possession, he must have deposited it in one of those four cities."

"And if I find that he has an account?"

"Get the date of his latest deposits, and, by using your official badge, try to learn the nature of such deposits, if you discover anything suspicious about the dates."

"And of course if that proves fruitless, you'd like me to search his effects at the hotel here?"

"If you can work it."

"I can do it." Carroll rose and shook her hand. "Davie is more lucky than he deserves in having you, Judith. And somehow you've imparted a little of your faith to me. But—what about the opal ring?"

The girl's eyes narrowed.

"I haven't thought very much about the ring—that is a detail that can be attended to later. The first thing is to find further substantiation of my suspicions. You will go to Charleston tomorrow morning?"

"Yes. I'll set Connie Hanvey the task of keeping an eye on Paisley."

"You have faith in Connie?"

"As in myself. Don't you worry, little girl. With the opportunity of clearing my boy I'll take no chances of failure."

BRIGHT and early the next morning, while Judith was on her way to the bank, Sheriff John Carroll waved to her from the driver's seat of his little car as he turned into the Charleston highway. She nodded brightly and reached the bank. Latimer had not yet arrived.

He drove his car to the makeshift garage in the rear of the bank at about ten o'clock, and a few minutes later was busily assorting his mail. Judith waited impatiently until he had finished and then she joined him. He scowled a greeting and curtly asked her what she wanted.

"I think there has been a terrible mistake made, Mr. Latimer," she started.

"Who made it?"

"Both of us. Although I suppose I was responsible——"

"Well?"

"Tell me: what is Gardner Paisley really doing in Karnak?"

Latimer's eyelids flickered, and the muscles of his face twitched almost imperceptibly. Aside from that he gave no hint of overkeen interest.

"How should I know?"

"He's a friend of yours, isn't he?"

"Hardly that."

"You knew him—before?"

"Slightly."

"Where?"

There was more than a hint of acridity in the banker's manner: a seeming touch of hostility.

"I don't see how this matter concerns you."

"It does. Please believe me when I tell you that it concerns me vitally. Where did you know Gardner Paisley?"

Latimer swung ostentatiously back to his desk.

"When you tell me why you want to know I will tell you about him?"

"And not otherwise?"

"Not otherwise."

"Very well!" Judith rose and laid her hand on his desk, forcing his eyes to hers. "Gardner Paisley—and not Davie Carroll—is the man who robbed this bank!"

"What?" In a trice Latimer was on his feet, his thin face seamed with lines of tense excitement. "What nonsense is this you are talking?"

"It is not nonsense: it is fact. And why not? Who is the man? Why did he come here? Has he done any work since he came here? Is Karnak a health resort? He says that he is in the real-estate business: but is he? Where did he come from and why? And above all—how do you explain the fact that he opened a checking account with us yesterday and that his initial deposit was four hundred dollars—four hundred dollars in the very bank-notes of the Second National which were stolen from that vault yonder!"

For a half minute eyes clashed with eyes, then Latimer turned abruptly and walked

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to the window to stare at the big cotton-field beyond, where a half hundred negroes chanted at their work.

"His deposit yesterday: how do you know that the bills were the same as those which were stolen?"

Judith bluffed. Her play was done unconsciously—the words slipped out almost of their own volition—

"Because I telephoned the Second National and checked up on the serial numbers!"

"Oh!"

The clock ticked away a quarter minute before the banker spoke again.

"I know nothing much about Paisley. I knew him in Charlotte, North Carolina. I haven't an idea of what his real business here may be. I don't believe that he is the man who robbed the bank. It is more than possible that there is some connection between him and Davie Carroll. But I shall see Paisley and ask him a few questions."

"May I be present?"

"You may not!" he snapped. "I am able to attend to that. I shall at least discover where he got that money."

There was a peculiar light in the girl's eyes as she made her way to the front office again. And she quite frankly tried to eavesdrop when Latimer returned from his trip to the hotel in the company of Gardner Paisley. They entered Latimer's office and the banker closed the door carefully and then locked it, so that the girl's efforts at eavesdropping proved futile. Once or twice she heard voices raised high in angry recrimination. But save for chance words —meaningless to her—she caught nothing of what was transpiring behind the door.

Fifteen minutes later Paisley left the bank; his rather pleasant face set in hard, ugly lines. Immediately the girl went in to see Latimer.

"Well," she demanded, "what did you learn?"

"Nothing," he growled. "He insists that he is here on real-estate business: timber buying for a land company whose name he will not give. He refused point-blank to explain where he got that money which he deposited yesterday."

"I believe my guess was pretty close to the mark," she hazarded. "At any rate, he is worth watching, don't you think?"

Latimer nodded.

"I don't think he had anything to do with the robbery, but I confess that I don't understand the matter of the bank-notes—and I shall take keen interest in watching him."

Later Latimer left the bank and within a quarter-hour of his departure the portly hotel landlady entered and presented a check drawn by Paisley.

"Is this any good?" she gushed. "Not that I'm doubtin' it, but seein' as the man who give it to me was a stranger I thought it was best to find out. You can't be too careful these days, you know. I remember once when Julian was up at Clemson to school and some one got him to cash a check—" She broke off at sight of the girl's face. "Good lands, you don't mean to tell me that man give me a check when he didn't have no money here? If he did——"

Fortunately, the quaver in Judith's voice did not make an impression on the loquacious landlady.

"The check is all right. Shall I cash it for you?"

"Just deposit it, please. You know, Judith, you just plumb give me a start when you looked at it thataway. Right off I thought that he'd played me a dirty trick."

"He's leaving?" Judith's voice was hard and dry.

"Land, yes, and it's sorry I am to see him go, because he's that jolly a young man. Nor he ain't so young, neither. 'Bout the age of Seth Dalrymple, perhaps, don't you think?"

"About," answered Judith absently. "You say he's leaving today?"

"Land sakes, yes. Are you deef, you didn't hear me say it oncet already? He's leavin' this afternoon in an autymobile."

"An automobile?"

"Yes, leastways that's what I heard him tellin' Mr. Latimer."

"A-a-ah!" Judith inhaled sharply, and then summoned a genial smile to her face. "Mr. Latimer is over there now?"

"Yes. Shall I tell him you want him?"

"No. I just wanted to know in case I needed him."

And then, by the exercise of all the strategy she possessed, the girl negotiated the chattering woman from the bank.

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ONCE she was gone, Judith dropped her smiling mask and sped back to the telephone, was plugged into a long-distance connection and eventually given the Second National Bank of Charleston.

"Hello! Can you tell me if Sheriff John Carroll of Karnak County is there now?"

In a few minutes the cashier himself answered.

"Who is this?"

"Judith Avery, teller of the Traders' Bank of Karnak."

"Sheriff Carroll left here less than fifteen minutes ago for the Merchant's & Pilot's Bank."

In a very few minutes Judith had the sheriff on the wire and had poured out her news breathlessly. Carroll's voice slapped back at her—his lethargic drawl completely gone for once in his easy-going life.

"What time?"

"I don't know, but you'd better hurry. Any luck there?"

"Luck? I should say. He made a cash deposit in this bank of eight hundred dollars the week after the robbery, and a similar deposit of the same amount in the Second National."

"Has he ever drawn any money from the Second National?"

"One check for fifty dollars about two weeks ago?"

"That's all?"

"All."

"And you'll hurry back here?"

"Hurry? My dear, this little flivver of mine is going to learn something about traveling. I'll be with you in an hour and a half. Meanwhile, you latch on to Connie Hanvey and let him stick tighter'n a leech to Mister Robber; understand?"

The girl laughed happily.

"I understand. But hurry. Hurry!"

VI

THE finding of long, lanky, efficient Connie Hanvey was no very difficult task. To him the girl gave Sheriff Carroll's orders with instructions not to let Paisley get out of his sight for so much as a minute at a time. The raw-boned, good-natured chap smiled his assent and the girl left him, secure in the belief that through Connie, at least, there would be no hitch to the plans for holding the new suspect.

A few minutes after she resumed her place behind the bank cage she discovered a check drawn by Joshua Latimer on his personal account for two hundred and fifty dollars. It was stamped with the "Paid" stamp. She took it to him.

"You cashed this?"

"Yes," he answered shortly.

"We haven't much cash on hand."

"Who's running this bank, young lady? If I choose to cash a personal check—what business is it of yours, anyway?"

The girl's figure grew rigid.

"I don't like your manner, Mr. Latimer."

"Is that so? There is one alternative."

"I take it then. I resign!"

She turned, crossed to the hat-tree and pinned the little straw hat on her mass of auburn hair. Then she left the bank without a word, so that she did not see what transpired some fifty minutes later in the little garage at the rear. Nor for that matter, did Connie Hanvey, who was with Judith on the veranda of the hotel, from which vantage-point the garage was screened from their gaze by the bank itself.

From far up the road came the chug-chug-thrrrump of the motor in the sheriff's car as he sped toward Karnak with his muffler cut out. Almost at the instant they spied it the long, green six-cylinder car belonging to Joshua Latimer shot from behind the bank, swung into the main road and sped in a cloud of dust toward Hell Hole Swamp which borders the town on the east of the railroad. Instinctively Connie pulled his revolver but shook his head and regretfully placed it back in the holster. The girl clutched his hand hysterically.

"Why don't you shoot: why don't you?"

"Can't," he responded lugubriously. "Curtains up all around that car and I don't know who's in it."

Closer and closer came the sheriff's little car. The girl sped down to Simpson's drug-store to fire a question at the attenuated druggist.

"Who was in Mr. Latimer's car when it passed here just now?"

Simpson, the omniscient, gave the desired information:

"That stranger feller—Gardner Paisley. Leastways, he's all I saw."

Judith and Hanvey were waiting with ill-concealed impatience when the sheriff's

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little car jerked to a halt before the hotel. The news was poured into his ears and he leaped back into the driver's seat, Judith beside him. Carroll depressed the clutch and the car shot ahead, Hanvey leaping on to the running-board as it passed him. But Carroll drove only a few rods. He stopped the car before one of the town's general stores and cut off his ignition. The engine puffed and died.

"What's the matter?"

"Gas!" bellowed the sheriff into the cavernous depths of the store, and as a boy appeared—"Get a hustle on, Jim."

The tank was filled and the motor started in response to Hanvey's muscular twirl of the crank. But this time when Judith joined him in the car, Carroll waved her aside.

"Can't go!"

"I'm going!" she asserted stubbornly.

"Can't. Paisley'll know we're after him—and there's liable to be real trouble."

"I'm engaged to marry Davie," she said quietly, "and you can't keep me away."

Without another word the car shot ahead, and it was not until they had bumped across the tracks which bound the town on the east that the sheriff spoke—and then it was to his deputy—

"Some girl, eh Connie?"

The deputy grinned absolute approval.

"I reckon!"

VII

THE road which had been taken by Gardner Paisley and the powerful six-cylinder car forks about three miles east of Karnak, one fork leading to Georgetown and the other to Florence. Between Karnak and the fork of the road, Sheriff Carroll said nothing, nor did he drive at top speed. Once there he stopped his car and hailed an ancient negro who was at work loafing under a tree.

"Uncle Zack," he hailed, "did you see a big car drive by here a few minutes ago?"

The old man scratched his head sagely and answered with maddening deliberateness.

"Now yo' asks, Marse John, it 'pears to me lak ah did."

"Which fork did it take?"

"Up dat way, ah reckons, Cap'n," and he pointed toward the Florence road.

Carroll waited for no more. The clutch shot down and the car leaped ahead. It was a straightaway road now for some ninety miles and the chase was on in earnest.

None of the three occupants of the car questioned the wisdom of the sheriff in giving chase in his little car. The roads through that section of South Carolina twist tortuously through the swamp country and are notoriously bad; affording greater average speed to the flivver of short wheelbase than to the more powerful sister with its six cylinders and greater ground-length.

It was this fact on which the sheriff was banking as he advanced gas and spark levels, muttered a tense "Keep a tight hold, you two!" and sent the doughty little machine hurtling through the quiet glades at its very best forty miles an hour; every joint rattling protestingly.

They sped on in silence for a half dozen miles, all three occupants of the bouncing, jouncing little car keeping a sharp lookout for signs of tracks where Latimer's car might have been swerved into the woods by its desperate driver. And then as they hit a smoother stretch of roadway the sheriff questioned Judith and she told him in detail of the cumulative events of the day. He was smiling grimly when she finished.

"The thing dovetails beautifully, and the fool gave himself dead away by this sudden flight. Well—we'll have him soon, and then Davie will be free."

"Yes," she agreed, "Davie will be exonerated. I still don't understand the opal ring. It might have been coincidence, except if that was the case Paisley would have continued to wear it."

"Nor do I understand it," growled Carroll. "But the job ahead of me now is capturing this man Paisley and making him loosen up that suave tongue of his."

"I think," vouchsafed the girl slowly, "that there may be other surprising developments in this case before we have finished with it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't want to say right now. I may be all wrong—ouch, that was a bad bump—but I have a suspicion."

The sheriff chuckled.

"I appoint you a deputy." Then his voice grew more serious. "Davie and I owe you debts which we can not repay, little girl. You're a woman in a million."

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She flushed with pleasure.

"I'm glad you think that. Of course I'm doing this for myself as well as for Davie. At first I thought he must be guilty. The ring shocked me so that for a long time I couldn't think judiciously: I could see nothing save the facts which indicated Davie's guilt. And then, after that, when I first came to the belief that perhaps Davie was innocent I began to see what was in the other side of the scales.

"And there were several little facts, insignificant of themselves, but which, when correlated, made up a chain which to my satisfaction, proved that Davie was not the man who had committed the robbery. And now I am satisfied."

"And so am I, Judith."

"There is still another angle to the affair."

"Which is?"

"Wait," she answered cryptically. "You shall see when you return to Karnak."

The road became rougher and the sheriff hunched over in his seat, eyes glued to the road and right foot taut on the brake pedal. His speed slackened to a mere fourteen miles an hour, at which he consoled himself with the thought that along such stretches as these the big car could have made not even that speed.

Mile after mile the road continued abominable: a mass of deep, vicious ruts cut by heavy farm wagons; of swollen branches and of sudden gullies which bounced the occupants of the little car against the protecting top. The road was bounded on either side by row after row of stately pine trees and their shorter and broader companions of oak and cypress, from the branches of which huge, ghastly bunches of gray moss hung pendant.

Ever before them in the dust of the road were engraved the imprints of Paisley's non-skid tires, and they told their tale well.

It was obvious from the twistings and turnings and skiddings of his wheel-tracks that his road had been no easy one. Here and there could be seen a blur on the road where the car had dipped into a rut and had trouble in extricating itself.

Another fact which delighted the pursuers was the knowledge that the car which Paisley was driving had a wheel width of fifty-six inches; making it impossible to run along in the sixty-inch ruts cut by the farm wagons and into which ruts the car of the sheriff fitted snugly.

Sheriff Carroll was taking chances, but he knew that Judith would not have things otherwise. Once let Paisley reach the wide, smooth road and the sheriff's only hope for catching him would be by notifying the other sheriffs of that part of the State by long-distance telephone, with every chance that they would miss their man and that he would make good his getaway on some outgoing train.

The chase meant more to the sheriff than the mere catching of a clever criminal. Without Paisley the task of proving Davie's non-complicity in the robbery would be a practical impossibility; the public would hoot at the idea. But with the man and a possible confession in hope of judicial leniency—in that way, and that way only, could Davie stand clear.

The afternoon drew toward its end. Hanvey had relieved his superior at the wheel for half an hour and then they had shifted again and the sheriff was pounding his little car ahead at top speed. The boarding of the floor was piping hot, the water in the radiator was boiling and hissing; the three occupants were battered and bruised by the constant jouncing: but they hung on doggedly.

THE sun sank slowly toward the west and the forest took on a ghostly gray tone, shot through with the fiery brilliance of the dying day. And suddenly the sheriff jerked his car to a halt with a shout of satisfaction.

"We'll get 'em soon," he exulted. "See there!"

"There" was a sudden swerving of the tracks made by Paisley car to the side of the road. The dust thereabouts had been beaten down by many footprints.

"An accident," breathed the girl.

"Evidently," rejoined Carroll. "Oh! I hope it was a bad one. I hope it delayed him."

Once again the flivver shot into the growing dusk, seemingly possessed of new life and added power.

About six o'clock they swung into a long stretch of rough road which fell away for about five miles in a straight line. And far up that road they descried a spot on the side of the road—a car motionless. Carroll pushed his gas lever down to the

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limit and the little car rocked and rolled as it cut through the evening, swooping down upon the quarry.

As they drew closer it was seen unmistakably that this was the car they sought, and when they were a half-mile away the girl caught her breath:

"Look!" she shouted.

A man detached himself from the shadow of the stalled car by the roadside and leaped into the woods. The girl choked back a sob.

"That's the man you want, Sheriff Carroll. Leave the car to Connie and myself. You get the man who ran into the woods: will you promise?"

Carroll nodded.

"I promise!"

"No matter what you see when we get there, you go after that man in the woods. And get him if it takes all night."

"I'll get him," muttered the sheriff grimly, "if it takes all of my life. I know these swamps and Paisley doesn't!"

They were closer now, and closer. The little car jerked to a throbbing stop.

"Into the woods!" commanded the girl shrilly, and the sheriff obeyed without a word, leaping from the car and plunging into the thicket along the road, feeling for his revolver as he ran.

The girl turned to Hanvey, who had joined her by the side of the car.

"Gun handy?"

The lanky man—his jaw set grimly—nodded.

"All ready."

"Then come on!"

They dashed to the front of the stalled car. There was a man in the front seat. Hanvey swung up his gun.

"Hands up!"

The man at the wheel raised his hands slowly and smiled in simulated surprise.

"What's the racket?" he drawled with remarkable self-possession.

Hanvey gasped with surprise, but the girl was self-contained. It was as though this was just what she had expected.

The man in the driver's seat was Gardner Paisley!

And somewhere in the forest, Sheriff Carroll was giving chase to the second man.

"Who in thunder is he?" questioned Hanvey of the girl and she answered with a monosyllable.

"Wait!"

VIII

PAISLEY was self-possessed to a remarkable degree. He smiled at the revolver in the hands of the lanky Hanvey.

"My hands are up," he drawled, "but what's the big idea?"

"You're under arrest," growled Hanvey.

"That's fine. For what?"

The girl answered—

"Robbery of the Traders' Bank of Karnak."

Paisley actually smiled.

"Is that a fact? I thought the son of your doughty sheriff was under arrest for that crime."

"He is," answered Judith briefly. "It has been a sort of camouflage. We've got you dead to rights."

"How so, may I ask?"

"This way—" and she reviewed for him the cumulative facts which had led to his arrest and would lead to his conviction: his deposits in two Charleston banks a week after the robbery; the deposit of the stolen money in the bank at Karnak; his friendship for Latimer and, last of all, his flight that afternoon in Latimer's car.

"To all of which will probably be added the theft of this car," finished Connie Hanvey.

Paisley seemed inclined to calm argumentativeness.

"How do you know there were not two men mixed up in this robbery?"

The girl answered him quietly.

"There were two men. Sheriff Carroll is searching for the other one now."

"I hope his hunt is successful," announced Paisley calmly.

"It will be. But—does that mean that you confess your complicity?"

"You are engaged to the sheriff's son, are you not?"

"Yes," she answered, surprised at his shift of subject.

"If I should confess will you give me your promise to work for a light sentence for me?"

"You mean try to influence the judge to give you the minimum?"

"Yes."

"It is a promise?"

"On my honor."

Paisley spoke quietly, as though discussing something no more important than the weather.

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"Very well, Miss Avery—and you, Mister Deputy Sheriff—I hereby confess that it was I who robbed the Traders' Bank. Does that satisfy?"

"It does!" half-sobbed the girl. "And I will try to get you off with a light sentence, Mr. Paisley. I will—truly. You—you don't know what this means to me."

The man grew suddenly grave.

"I do, Miss Avery. And perhaps it is that knowledge that has brought out one latent spark of decency in me. Robbing a bank is one thing—my profession as you might say—but ruining the life of a clean young man and making a pretty girl miserable—" He sighed. "Why in thunder was I born with a soft heart, anyway?"

There came a shout from the side of the road and two figures emerged from the woods. In the rear was Sheriff Carroll, and his revolver was trained steadily on the back of the lanky, bedraggled figure in front.

"Look what I found!" bellowed the sheriff.

The man whom he held as prisoner was Joshua Latimer!

The little procession reached the car, a puzzled frown corrugating the sheriff's forehead.

"I suppose I'll arrest him for complicity in this man's escape—or attempted escape."

"No," said Judith quietly, "you may hold him on a greater charge than that."

"A greater charge?"

"Robbery of the Traders' Bank!"

"I say——"

"Listen to me," she said. "This man here has confessed that it was he who actually did the robbing. I have pledged my word that I would help him to a light sentence. May I count on your help?"

Carroll nodded.

"You're boss of this undertaking. What you say, goes. But what about Latimer here?"

Latimer, thoroughly cowed, flashed a beseeching glance toward Paisley. But Paisley merely grinned.

"Don't look to me to pull you out, you old blatherskite! You've just about gone the limit this time."

"How did you know Latimer was mixed up in it?" questioned Carroll of the girl.

"Several things," she explained. "When I once got the idea that perhaps Davie was innocent I began to think carefully over the details of the robbery. The opal ring was all that bothered me. Then the vital fact of the express shipment of money struck me.

"You will remember, Sheriff, that Mr. Latimer has always said that the robber got away with seven thousand dollars. He also insisted that the package of money had not been opened after its arrival at the Traders' Bank. Do you recall that?"

"Yes."

"You can well understand that no detail of that robbery could have escaped me. The whole thing was indelibly impressed on my mind. And about a week or so after the robbery I remembered that when the robber took that package of money out of the safe—the seals had already been broken and the package opened!"

"Ah! And then?"

"Mr. Latimer had lied. I questioned him again and he insisted that he had not opened that package. 'Certainly I had not.' There must have been some reason for that. Following that came the conflict of his story with Davie's: Davie insisted that Latimer gave him two thousand dollars for the mortgage on the Farris tract. Latimer said he had not.

"But Davie had two thousand dollars out of that shipment. And that is what the package was opened for—to give Davie the two thousand dollars.

"Can't you see for yourself how cleverly Latimer has worked to clean up several thousand dollars for himself and at the same time forever preclude the possibility of suspicion against him? Who would think of questioning a man who denied giving away two thousand dollars?

"Another thing: you and Mr. Latimer have always been enemies. Latimer has always hated Davie—principally because Davie was your son. He worked this whole thing so that a web of circumstantial evidence would fasten about Davie beyond any possibility of refutation before a jury. The culminating stroke in his whole rotten plan was having me there to witness the robbery, and making sure that I—Davie's fiancée—would be the one to convict him.

"Other events dovetail excellently. When Mr. Paisley first showed up at the bank with some of the stolen money I questioned him about his friendship with Latimer. He said they had known each other in Cincinnati. Mr. Latimer told me that he had known Paisley in

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Charlotte. Furthermore, when I became convinced today that Paisley was the man I told Mr. Latimer, and he agreed that I might be right.

"But instead of having Paisley arrested he immediately went over to the hotel and arranged for Paisley to get away in his car, knowing that the railroads would be watched. That, coming after a knowledge of their friendship and the knowledge that Latimer professed to believe that Paisley was guilty of the crime, satisfied me.

"Furthermore, Latimer cashed his personal check for two hundred and fifty dollars today. That money, I am positive, will be found in Paisley's pockets." She stepped back triumphantly. "What do you think, Sheriff John Carroll?"

"I think," said the sheriff admiringly, "that you are too blamed good for my son!"

"And now," the girl swung on Paisley, "will you tell me how you came to wear the ring with the three opals?"

"Latimer's work," answered the confessed robber cheerfully. "He told me if I'd wear that ring it would result in the arrest of some one else. He didn't tell me that I'd run a decent young fellow into the pen and ruin the life of as square a young girl as I've ever known. Latimer double-crossed me right along. He got the goods on me three years ago for a little job I was mixed up in, and he's used that as a club several times to drive me into other little jobs.

"Not that I'm squealing. But you've got me dead to rights and if I'm going up the real crook might as well go, too. It'll do him good."

The sheriff met Paisley's eyes squarely.

"Thanks, Paisley. You're a decent sort." Then he swung on Latimer—hate glowed from his eyes and the ex-banker cowered in terror. "Needn't cringe: I'm not going to manhandle you. Do you confess?"

Latimer looked up like a cornered rat.

"No!" he snapped.

Sheriff Carroll smiled.

"I'm glad of that, Latimer; because you'll get a longer sentence after a trial than you would if you confessed. And now—" he turned to the girl.

"Let's go home," she said, "I'm tired and I have a headache—and I want to be the first to tell Davie!"

THE AGED ADVENTURER

BY OSCAR C. WILLIAMS

THEY say that he is old and tired
And seeks his little peace at last;
They know not that his present holds
The dreams of all his golden past.

They know not that his youth comes back
With greater magic, light and power,
And nestles quietly within
Each hoary, dreamy, thought-filled hour.

They say they find his eyes are dim,
And now and then his head a-nod;
But oh, they know not that it is
Because he once had looked on God.

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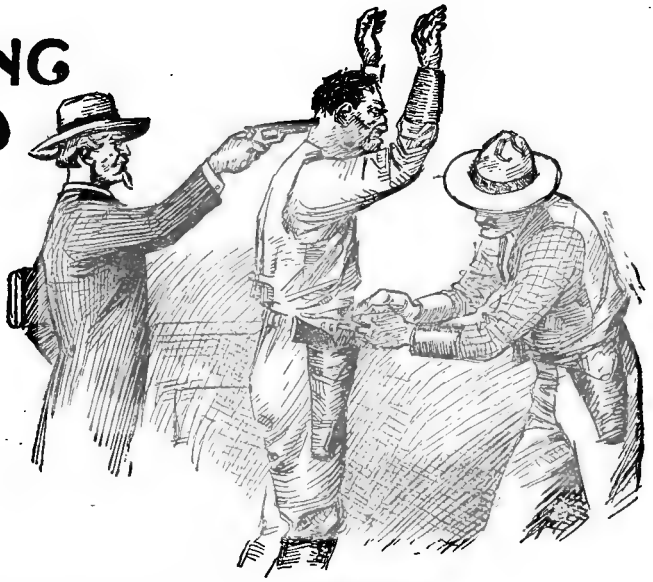
ACCORDING TO BREED

BY

E. S. Pladwell



Author of "On Short Allowance," "The Seeds of Wrath," etc.

"MAJORS—colonels—jedge this an' jedge that—I'm sick of it! This here country's gittin' crowded with titles! All the old Democratic cattle that Grover Cleveland didn't want back East he sent here to pasture on us. Major—huh!"

Lem Brule leaned against the bar and roared his opinions to nobody in particular, but the awed denizens of the New Era dance-hall were strangely quiet and the air seemed to vibrate with a tense electric feeling that goes before a storm. Brule ignored it. He was privileged.

"Billy the Kid" left a worse record for manslaughter further east, in Arizona and New Mexico; over in Nevada Slade had been more artistic in cold-blooded killing; up in Montana Masterson shot better; but in this land of prospectors and ranchers and cattlemen and small tradesmen Brule was the ranking terror with notches on his gun and a volcanic eye that made men cower.

He looked the bad-man. Billy the Kid was a slight bit of venom; Slade had been almost apologetic in manner; but Brule stood six-feet-two in his high-topped boots and, when he walked, the big forty-fives on his hips swayed with every step.

His face was black with the stubble of a half shaven beard that surrounded an aquiline nose. His lower lip stood out truculently by habit. His eyes were twin black coals, like the eyes of Moro head-hunters, and over his low, flat forehead hung tangles of greasy dark hair. He was uncouth, unwashed, unkempt and unruly—the worst the country ever knew.

Brule sober was dangerous enough but Brule drinking displayed the sardonic, lethal humor of a cat playing with a mouse—and Brule was drinking. Thirty men and ten women stood aside and pitied his victim silently. Some female faces were whiter under the paint, but that was the only sign.

"If these —— old carpet-baggin' billy-goats was any good they'd be wanted home," continued the sneering Brule. "A person'd think, now, that a major might have some standin' back there—if he was a real major an' not a cheap, bowin', scrapin', boot-lickin' hound of a politician—but no. It's apparent they got no more use for them mavericks than we have!"

Major Montgomery Clayton, late of Georgia, but now receiver of the local land office, had heard about enough. Quite deliberately the major put down his newspaper at a side-table and arose, stiffening to the full extent of his slight figure while his flashing blue eyes looked straight into the brooding brown ones of the killer. The latter leaned against the bar easily with his hand near his right hip and his teeth showing in a curious smile. The others silently

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tiptoed out of the line of possible flying lead.

"Well!" roared the bully, in mock surprise. "Look—a nice little slick politician with billy-goat whiskers an' black store clo'es. Who'd think we'd have sich high-falutin comp'ny in a hell-hole like this? Hey, Major?"

The dapper little middle-aged Southerner understood. Despite this human cobra's roistering manner the major knew himself the victim of the afternoon's orgy, and whether he would escape alive was problematical. He knew there was no motive behind it all—nothing but the swaggering devilishness of a cynical, unwashed degenerate whose ego would bloat by making a Federal officer his victim—but the blaring public insult made the major's spine tingle and his look was deadly as the bully's.

The major had not come to this dance-hall by desire but because it was the general meeting-place of the men he had to deal with. Here, in a country yet new to him, he did not desire to set himself apart, so he mingled freely and longed for the kindlier liquors of his old homeland.

If he now regretted his coming he failed to show it. Antietam and Shiloh, Bull Run and Spottsylvania had left their traces on his body, but not in his soul.

"Here, you, I want no more of yo' insolence!" thundered the major, speaking as if to an uppety negro and pointing a commanding forefinger.

"Yeh?" murmured the killer, speculatively. His hand was not an inch from his pistol-butt.

"Yes!" roared the major, walking straight up to him and shaking an irate fist while the others gasped. "You may kill an unahmed man, like the rest of yo' cowardly murders, but yo' scoundrel remarks about Kunnel Hunter and Jedge Pope of the Land Office, and myse'f, can not be tolerated! Here, you drunken swine—take off yo' guns or give me one—I'll teach you not to make remarks about yo' betters!"

"Yeh?" snarled Brule. "Betters, eh?"

His right hand reached downward and outward like lightning. A flash of steel and a flash of flame dazzled the onlookers at the same instant. A deep roar shook the 'dobie dance-hall. A piece of planking shattered in front of the major's feet.

"Dance!" shouted the killer. "Dance, you puffy old carpet-bagger—I'll make you shut up about betters!"

The major's lean face became apoplectic but he moved not a muscle. Brule's left hand swung back and produced another weapon.

"Dance!" snarled the impatient killer.

Another explosion sent a bullet into the welt of the major's right shoe and tore off the end of a toenail. He could not help moving. A third bullet smashed the end of the other shoe, and then the dance began.

MADDENED, seeing red, quivering with wrath, trying vainly to advance, the major yet caught himself counting the shots while his feet sprang upward, away from the tingling lead that spattered into the floor. The fifth shot came while the major danced higher. Six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Then they stopped, while the acrid smoke cleared away. And the killer had two six-shooters.

"You dawg!" choked the Southron, forgetting those still loaded pistols and charging head-downward in blind rage. "Kill me now or by heaven I'll kill you!"

The major had gone beyond caring. But Lem Brule only wanted a victim of quality with whom to humor his whim of the moment. He had had part of his fun; the better part was coming. With a lightning move the desperado slid the pistol from his right hand into the holster and with that powerful hand he checked the rush of the slighter man, spun him sidewise, grasped the back of his neck, and shoved him with mighty force along the length of the bar and into the doorway.

Then, while the awed denizens of the place looked on and gasped, Brule swung back a heavy boot and kicked the major sprawling into the dirt of the roadway.

"That's the way to handle them skunks!" roared Brule, as he turned away.

Montgomery Cassius Clayton, receiver of the United States Land Office, member of one of the most revered families of the Old South, blood-kin to the governor of Georgia, commander of fighting battalions in the honorable Army of the Lost Cause from Bull Run to Cold Harbor, picked himself out of the road very slowly and dusted off his broadcloth coat as if in a trance.

He, a gentleman and son of a gentleman, had been booted out of a tawdry Western dance-hall by a low-browed nondescript hardly the equal of the negroes the major had owned! The episode was impossible—

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unthinkable. His world had turned in front of his startled and unbelieving eyes. As he came to his feet he swayed like a drunken man.

The major braced himself and stared into the dark doorway of the building, partly in bewilderment and partly in the blackest anger he had ever known. No good Samaritan arrived to give him assistance. Inside the dance-hall the killer had made that impossible, while those who were his sycophants roared with laughter.

"Come forward, all—the drinks are on me!" he shouted. "Them that won't drink with me, say so!"

There were no refusals.

The major took two steps forward, with his brain still reeling and his fingers itching for the feel of a weapon; but his clearing mind warned him against immediate action and he turned and started walking away to think it over. Perhaps by habit, his footsteps turned toward the frame bungalow that he called his home, a mile up the road toward the foothills.

The gracious afternoon sunlight brought no delight to the major's eye, though it tinged with pink the white tops of shadowed Western mountains that towered above a broad valley. Dun foothills, flat green meadows rich with pasturage, a slim desert river with its wide border of white alkali lands, the domes of distant eastern hills reflecting with copper and red and purple and orange the soft rays of the sun—all failed this time to catch the veteran's artist eye and make him thrill with the glory of his new home. With head bowed and shoulders drooped he plodded along the dusty road, a lonely little black figure.

Steve Nicholson rode by on a pinto en route to his Las Mesas ranch and offered awkward sympathy. Steve had also been in the dance-hall.

"It's a darned shame!" sighed Steve. "Somebody ought to git that big-mouthed rattlesnake, but who'll do it?"

The major turned a moody eye toward the rider.

"It may be, Misteh Nicholson, that I will do it," he responded.

"What? Don't try—don't try!" warned the alarmed rancher. "Major, that fellow always gits the best of it. Always! Why he's even downed them that had the drop on him. They couldn't kill him in cold blood and he ain't hampered that way—savvy? You're lucky he didn't git you today. For Gawd's sake, Major, keep away from him!"

A speculative look appeared in the warrior's eyes.

"You say, Misteh Nicholson, that this pusson has never been in a faiah fight?"

"Never! And he never will! He ain't built that way! You'd better keep away from him, Major—I'm tellin' you frank, you won't have a chance!"

"Thank you, Misteh Nicholson," bowed the major. "I am deeply grateful fo' yo' info'mation. The pusson will have a new experience!"

There was that in the old warrior's manner which blocked further protest. Steve Nicholson was about to speak again but noticed it and checked himself.

"I'm sorry," he gulped, looking vaguely off toward the mountain-tops. "Anyhow, you've got my sympathy—I mean, my best wishes."

"Thank you," bowed the major.

There was an awkward pause, and then Steve Nicholson dug spurs into his pinto, waved a friendly hand, and departed, shaking his head.

LEE CLAYTON, the major's young son, burst into the bungalow a half-hour later, aghast at the news and fearful of results. He found his father seated calmly on a sofa in the little living-room and oiling a fine new pistol. Beside him was a big, flat red plush case that made Lee's eyes bulge when he saw it. It had been kept for years in the bottom of a trunk.

"Dad!" breathed the youth. "Not that—not that!"

The major looked up to see his son pointing at the case. He nodded soberly.

"I fear so, Lee."

"What?" The son looked as if his father was going mad before his eyes. "Dad!" Lee sat beside the major and put an arm about his shoulder. "Let that man alone. Let him be. He's not worth bothering about. Let him be!"

The major shook a negative head and Lee knew the futility of arguing.

"All right—let me go!" offered the boy.

"You?" drawled the major, looking over his child suddenly grown to manhood. "No, Sonny; I have my own way of 'tending to this matter."

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The major was soft-voiced and tender and utterly final, as usual, and the sixteen-year-older chafed but knew the decisions were all made. He took another tack.

"But, Dad," he cried, in horrified protest, "you don't intend to use those old dueling pistols? Why, it's—it's madness!"

"Not madness, Sonny; sacrilege. None but gentlemen have ever used those pistols befo'." The major sighed. "To think they have come to this!"

In his mind's eye the old warrior visualized those less uncouth olden days when gentlemen, with all the exquisite ceremonial and courtesy of a formal French garden party and all the deadliness of sudden murder, unloaded those pistols into each other 'neath chosen weeping-willow trees on the lawns before breakfast, while kind seconds and family physicians stood just near enough to catch the last words of the gentleman who lost.

Thinking of these things, the major found his eyes filming as other memories of his old home followed in natural sequence until Lee's voice blew them away, like a hand fanning into smoke-wreaths.

"But why are you using those old pistols anyhow?" insisted Lee. "What do you intend to do?"

"I am going—God help me—to make a piece of po'ly constructed human trash take watah fo' once in his life! I'll kill him or make him forever afraid to live heah!"

"But—Dad—you're li'ble to try something too dangerous!"

"There is no danger."

"No danger?"

"No. Barring a streak of luck, there was never a po' mongrel yet that could stand up to a thoroughbred, whether man, dawg, hawss or rabbit!"

"But," protested the dubious son, "he may shoot first and learn about yo' pedigree later."

The major gave his progeny a baleful look at this near-impudence.

"There is no danger," he repeated.

The reply was so calm, so certain, so final, that it staggered the younger man. Followed a stormy session in which the son pleaded, begged, argued, defied and raved. At the end of that time the major calmly announced that his preparations were completed, put the modern pistol in his pocket, tucked the red plush case under his left arm, and started back on the road that led to the dance-hall at the edge of the settlement. A look and the firm pressure of a fatherly hand was all that the son got for his arguing.

Joe Williams of Lone Pine was just about to mount his horse at the hitching-rail in front of the New Era dance-hall when the belligerent major came around the corner, carrying that red plush case in his left hand.

The snow-topped Western mountains, with a lowering sun behind them, had by now thrown their blue-haze shadows almost across the valley; but neither Williams nor the major noticed scenic effects just then. The former started with a jump to head the major off, and pleaded with him earnestly. The major was inflexible. Finally the beaten Williams tied up his horse.

"All right, Major," he sighed. "If you must, you must. I'll make sure o' fair play, anyhow." A jangle of piano-music and a loud gust of laughter from the dance-hall gave Williams another idea. "Wait here," he suggested. "I'll see how the land lies." And he turned away and walked into the side-door of the building.

A minute later the scout returned.

"It's all serene," he murmured. "The fellow's still in there, standin' at the end of the bar, near the back door. Anything else I can do——"

"Thank you," bowed the major. "You have been very kind. The rest of it—that is in the hand of fate, suh!"

The man from Lone Pine shrugged.

The shooting might have begun by mutual consent a minute later, but by chance Brule was off his guard for just one instant when the major slid around the corner of a rear door. Perhaps the killer was negligent because his right hand was reaching for a glass on the bar. Silently the major stepped behind him, holding that modern pistol with hammer up and trigger ready for just one tiny pressure.

"Hands up!" ordered the major.

Brule's muscles tensed, but the feel of ice-cold steel on the back of his neck made his arms obey mechanically and he stood like a statue, stiff with wary anger. The others in the place backed away suddenly, clattering their feet.

"Mistch Williams," requested the major, without turning, "would you please remove the ahm'ment of this—pusson?"

Joe Williams stepped up and unbuckled the killer's belt and pistols, then felt in his shirt and boots for other weapons. The

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shirt held a derringer. As Williams produced it the killer's dark eyes became slits.

"I'll git you fer that," threatened Brule, softly.

"You be still!" snapped the major. "Yo' orders are to walk twenty feet along the bar. Now move!"

The killer hesitated but finally obeyed, swaggering along the bar as if humoring the whim of a fool. He caught the eye of a sycophant in the crowd and smiled sardonically while holding his lazy arms upward.

"Kin I put my arms down now?" he asked with mock politeness, as he turned.

"Yes," snapped the major.

BRULE allowed his hands to slump down and he leaned against the bar easily with slit eyes watching the major's slightest move. Brule was called a rattlesnake and now he looked it; he was ready to uncoil and strike at the slightest chance. His easy, stealthy manner gave the watchful major a twinge of revulsion.

"Here, you mis'able hound!" snarled the irritated major, shoving that red plush case along the bar with his free hand toward the killer, "I'm giving you the honah of fighting honest fo' yo' wuthless hide—unless you choose to be shot where you stand." The killer's eyes flickered. "You will find two dueling pistols in that case. Open it and choose yo' weapon!"

Prone to disobey, Brule first glanced around the crowd. His reputation as the reigning terror was suffering. But that stern little Southron gave him no recourse, so, with a lordly shrug of his shoulders he stepped up to the case and opened it.

Two old saw-handle pistols with finely scrolled barrels lay there, each pistol loaded with powder and slug. The killer smiled. As if to look one over, he took it out of the case by the handle, holding it easily in his right hand and bringing up the barrel carelessly till it pointed toward the major.

Quick as a flash of light, Brule's forefinger pressed the trigger, so fast that the twitches of his hand could not be counted.

The major looked disgusted.

"I neglected to tell you that I took out the springs," murmured the major. "Yo' cowardly action was expected befo'hand."

The failure of that pistol to go off had given the amazed Brule his first mental jar—as the major expected. The latter continued:

"You are going to play honest this time, or die! You see this six-shootah in my right hand? That is my guar'ntee of faiah play. The dueling pistols will decide the rest. Without turning my head I will now request Misteh Williams to place in my left hand the other pistol in the case. Thank you, Misteh Williams. And now you will find two long miner's fuses in the case. Kindly tuck the end of a fuse into the nipple of each saw-handle."

All this time the killer was staring at the major in bewilderment as well as anger. Now he hurled the ancient pistol on the sawdust floor.

"What's this foolin' all about?" he roared. "I don't shoot with tin whistles on sticks!"

"I will count three," returned the major, quietly. "If you considah yo'self unable to proceed then, I will—execute you!"

There was a scuffling in the awed crowd and a murmur of voices, and Williams held Brule's captured weapons ready in case of possible intervention.

"One!" snapped the major.

The evil-eyed killer was too far away to leap on the major if he wanted to, and the warrior's six-shooter was held easily but warily. Brule stood like a brooding statue while the crowd looked on and held its collective breath.

"Two!" tolled the major.

Straight-shouldered, inexorable as death the stern old warrior moved his lips for the last word. Brule waited one instant, then slowly stooped over and picked up the old dueling pistol, straightening up by the bar and mumbling. That made the second score for the major in the queer psychological campaign he was waging. The major was not bluffing. He was sure of himself.

"Now, Misteh Williams, proceed with the fuses," requested the old warrior. "They are each one yahd long. When you get them in the nipples, you and Misteh Bahtender will please light the ends at the same time. Thank you. Now—go!"

THEN began the strangest duel the country ever knew, with shaken bystanders, well out of the line of fire, looking on in shocked silence as little sparks began to eat their way up the yard-long fuses toward gunpowder.

At first the scowling, eager Brule held out the pistol with a tense arm, as the major

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expected him to do. That was score three for the major, for the killer forgot for the moment that it takes about five minutes for a yard of ordinary miner's fuse to burn. The major forgot nothing. He could not afford to. He held his dueling pistol easily in his left hand, with his six-shooter on the bar but within very easy reach of his right hand in case Brule made a move.

By a sudden action the killer might have whipped out his fuse and jammed the lighted end down the nipple of his old pistol, but that would have been suicide. The fuse fitted the nipple flatly. The nipple was a quarter-inch long. By the time Brule engineered the spark down that narrow little hole the major could easily grasp that modern pistol on the bar and annihilate him.

Brule's hand began to tremble, partly from strain because of his tenseness. That was expected, too. Then the major, in a soft, silky voice, started a low, conversational monologue while the deadly fuses were still dangling low from the pistols.

With the big, hulking figure of the country's most dangerous bully facing him and holding that ancient pistol with slightly trembling hands, the major launched into a cold-blooded and carefully planned analysis of the effect of projectiles on the human body, describing wounds with exquisite detail while Brule's face grew more morose with each passing second.

The sparks sizzled one-third of the way up the fuses. The major discussed the shattering, spattering effects of leaden slugs while Brule's face began to whiten under its dark tan.

The sparks reached the half-way mark. The major described Civil War horrors with fiendish perfection. Brule's face became even whiter and his hands trembled a bit. He seemed to sag against the bar, but some tense person snickered nervously and he pulled himself together, not without effort.

The sparks went two-thirds of the way, then three-quarters. The major held his dueling pistol at ease and stood erect while Brule leaned against the bar and breathed heavily, watching the pistol wide-eyed as the major, with great gusto, mentioned his cruelest hospital experiences.

Slowly, very slowly, the sparks neared the nipples of the pistols; first five inches away, then four, then three, with the major pointing that black muzzle straight at the eyes of the quaking, breaking Brule and launching into a masterly peroration on the parting of body and soul.

"There is just a flash and a roar, and that is all," concluded the major.

"No!" shrieked Brule, hoarsely, as he let the pistol drop to the floor, on a sloping pile of sawdust, and backed away from it. "No! Don't kill me—don't shoot—my Gawd, I can't stand it—I can't stand it!"

The major gave the quaking, abject figure a contemptuous look. "Come!" he ordered. "Take yo' death like a man!"

Brule held out hands that pleaded.

"No—no—no!" he wailed. "Lemme go—lemme out of here! I didn't mean it, Major—honest, I didn't mean it! Lemme out of here!"

The man was broken. Sagging to his knees, he was begging for his life and sobbing like a child, while bystanders gave him silent contempt as they carefully kept away from that sputtering pistol on the floor whose muzzle, resting on a little mound of sawdust, pointed upward toward a side window. The major ignored Brule. He said but one word.

"Wait!"

The major lowered his dueling pistol and watched the flame entering the powder-chamber of the weapon on the floor, and his own. The crowd caught his grim curiosity and also watched.

Suddenly, with a yell, the frantic, nerve-broken Brule leaped toward the nearest window and hurtled through it feet first, taking the pane with him. A sudden streak of flame lashed out from the weapon on the floor and it hurtled backward to the bar after it had hurled out its load. Glass tinkled as the bullet hit a sash of the same window and deflected. The killer, almost through, put up his hands with a spasmodic jerk and stopped in mid-career. His head fell forward and he slumped to the ground limply. In his blind terror he had forgotten where that pistol had pointed.

Two seconds later the weapon in the major's hand shot its lead into the floor.

"Dead!" murmured the dazed bartender, peering through the smoke toward the window. "Why—why—he was killed by the gun he dropped."

"A miracle!" exclaimed the wide-eyed Williams. "And he lost because he couldn't stand the gaff!"

"Jes' so," agreed the major, calmly.

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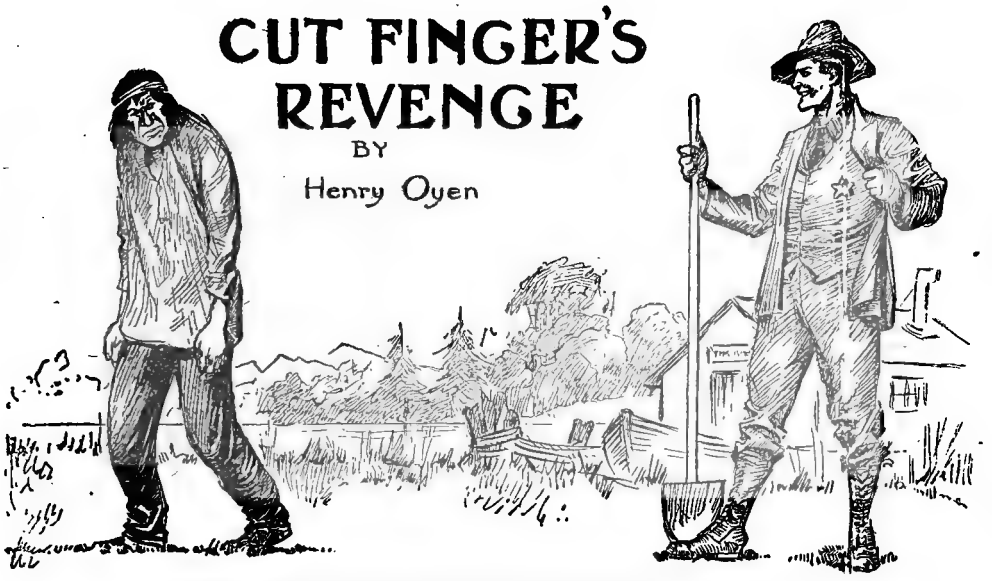
CUT FINGER'S REVENGE

BY

Henry Oyen



Author of "Gaston Olaf and Big Business," "The Game Warden," etc.

CUT FINGER had never learned to read. And this is a story which demonstrates how deplorable is a lack of education.

Cut Finger—Kis-ke-net, as it was in his own tongue—poled his canoe into the slack water well below the roaring water-falls and made fast to an out-jutting tamarack root. He could well have poled up to the landing, where the mists of Dead-Man Falls hung like a cloud over the river, but Cut Finger was lazy even for an Indian. There was a strip of white water to pole through before one reached the landing. Cut Finger did not like white water. He was no mad white man to waste his good strength in bucking the might of the tumultuous Porcupine.

That was work. Cut Finger did not like work. He did not like many things, in fact. Had the question of what he liked in this world been put to him he might have summed his reply up in one single word: hooch. He liked hooch. Nothing else would have prompted him to the exertion of poling up the Porcupine to Dead-Man Falls. The gold claims were on the Porcupine, directly above the falls, and the white men had a settlement there, and in the settlement there was whisky.

Kis-ke-net stepped nimbly ashore and shuffled smoothly up the trail which led around the falls to the settlement on the height above. In times past his ancestors had avoided the falls, making a portage around them deep in the woods that they might not come within sight of the great mass of water tumbling down hill and shattering itself on the ugly maze of rock-points amongst which all red men knew dwelt the evil spirits which gave the falls their name.

But Cut Finger was a modern Indian, though he could not read, and he knew better than to believe in the old follies. The white men came and went on the trail near the water. The white men were wise. Also their trail was the shorter. Cut Finger loved a short trail, especially when bent on a quest for liquor.

The first sign of the settlement which he came to was a small shanty-boat roped to the bank two hundred yards or so above the falls. At the sight of it, Cut Finger slipped like a snake into the brush and coiled up. True, he had a dollar in his pocket, but why buy if one can steal? It was in the middle of the forenoon, and being familiar with the habits of the gold-hunters he knew that unless the owner of the boat had a woman the craft in all probability would be deserted. Even if there was a woman the boat might be unguarded, for it was in the berry season, and while the man was out digging at the creeks the woman probably would be out picking berries.

Kis-ke-net made sure that he had been unobserved, that he was well hidden, and

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patiently scrutinized the shanty-boat. He looked first of all for signs of a woman. Experience had taught him that white women were strange creatures. Wherever they were to be found there also were to be found strange pieces of cloth hung out on lines or poles to dry.

Cut Finger never troubled his mind to reason out the reason for the drying clothes, any more than a wolverene pauses to reason about the smell of iron which drives it away from the vicinity of a poorly set trap, but when he had carefully studied the boat and found no sign of washing about it he was greatly relieved. There was some crude lettering on a board over the door, but as Cut Finger could not read it did not trouble him.

The square window in the side of the boat next received the Indian's careful attention. White women carried their eccentricity about cloth even to their windows; where there was a white woman there would be cloth hung on the window. But there was no curtain about this window; it was blank, as befitted the domicile of men. Furthermore, through the glass there was visible a bottle containing the stump of a candle. Cut Finger's black eyes glowed. He knew bottles when he saw them, and where men used whisky bottles for candle-holders there was probably much whisky near at hand.

Groping noiselessly in the brush he found a pebble and threw it at the house-boat door There was no response. He waited a moment and threw again. Then he stood up boldly; there was no white man at home or he would have been out, demanding with strong words who was doing that throwing.

Cut Finger looked up the river to assure himself that the settlement was quite out of sight, and a few seconds later he was leaning against the shanty-boat wall as stolidly as if he had been there for an hour. He was a cautious Indian, although his throat was crying for the hooch which he hoped to find inside, and he knew the ways of white men with Indians caught stealing. He would take no chances, not even for hooch; therefore he leaned against the wall of the boat for fifteen minutes, ready to whine for tobacco if a white man appeared.

At the end of the fifteen minutes, his peace of mind disturbed by nothing larger than a scolding red squirrel, he took one last look around, and moved swiftly and in a manner that marked him for the experienced thief he was. His thick-bladed hunting-knife slipped beneath the window, and cut the skin thong that held it down. The window swung inward noiselessly. Cut Finger peered inside. The room was uninhabited.

With one final glance over his shoulder he drew himself up and thrust his head and shoulders inside. It was a small window and Cut Finger was a large Indian. He pulled and puffed until he lay for a breathing space on the window sill, half in, half out.

"*Un-nah!*" grunted Kis-ke-net, summoning himself for one final wriggle, and then—

Swish! Whack!

A pick-handle fell on that portion of the red man outside the window with a force that spraddled him out like a killed frog.

"*Un-nah!*" he grunted in a new tone.

"*Swish! Whack!* The pick-handle beat a wicked tattoo. Kis-ke-net now lay silent, stoically taking his punishment. He was caught. He dared not attempt to crawl forward, he could not retreat. The punishment ceased at last. Strong hands grasped his ankles and he was jerked like a bag of meal back on to the ground.

Kis-ke-net rose slowly to his feet. Before him stood a big, clean-limbed youth with a merry blue eye and a grin on his wholesome, tanned countenance.

"*Quas-kay-lallay,*" greeted the young man pleasantly; but his face darkened as he recognized his victim. "Oh, it's you, is it, you big bum? Kis-ke-net, the hi-yu hooch-fiend, eh? Trying to do a little fancy porch-climbing, were you? Well, you can't do it in this settlement any longer, Cut Finger; not even to that rotten bum-boat there. Savvee? No more hell-raising for you around this camp. We're cleaning up here. You're after hooch, ain't you? Well, you take my advice; go get it some place else. This place doesn't want you. Now, *kik-a-lap,* skidoo."

The merry young man picked up a long-handled shovel which he had dropped.

"They've made me be marshal," he said, flashing a battered star. "You hike."

Cut Finger hiked. He went headlong into the brush, his gait resembling somewhat that of a bear which has been peppered with fine shot. When he was well hidden in the balsams he stopped. Cut Finger did not swear. Neither did he rub. He was an Indian; he did not even grimace. But as

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he recalled the blows that had flattened him in the window his heart grew bold and black within him, and he knew now that he must have hooch more than ever. Hooch would give him courage, courage would enable him to have revenge, and revenge, he must have; yes, even more than he must have hooch.

He stayed in the bush for some time. By parting some branches he could look down at the river and see the shanty-boat. Even from there the crude lettering over the door of the boat was visible, but as said before, Cut Finger could not read.

The man who had beaten him was nowhere in sight. As a matter of fact, he had continued his way laughingly up the trail the moment the Indian had vanished, but Kis-ke-net reasoned that he had gone aboard the boat. It was the laughing man's boat, of course, else why the clubbing and anger? Yes, it was the merry young man's boat. He had come back after his morning's work in the creeks. It had been unlucky for Cut Finger; it would be more unlucky for the white man in time.

Kis-ke-net sat in the bush, staring at the boat and the river for a long time, the roar of Dead-Man's Falls constantly in his ears. So far as the eye could make out he was guilty of no more intelligence than some great turtle sunning itself on a rock, but Kis-ke-net's mind was working. He saw what he saw, heard what he heard. Now he must have hooch, the raw burning stuff that strengthens a man's courage and makes him capable of taking revenge.

HE WENT on to the settlement by a round-about way, finally approaching it from up-stream, and slunk swiftly behind the short row of frame buildings until he came to the rear door of Gavin's saloon. Kis-ke-net had no legal right to enter the place, so he sat down on the rear steps and waited. Presently some hanger-on about the saloon would pass by and give Cut Finger a wink. Then the Indian would follow and, producing the dollar he had taken from his squaw that morning, he would receive a bottle containing a composition guaranteed to madden any Indian in ten minutes.

Gavin's was very full and very noisy this morning. No one gave a glance toward the back door, and there was laughing, and Gavin was talking loudly.

"I'll get him, boys, watch my smoke!"

Gavin was a tall man, built much like the man who had smitten Cut Finger, but his voice was a squeak.

"Did you see me talking to him? Some talker, I am, boys. What the —— do we want with a marshal here, eh? What we want is——"

"Gavin!"

Cut Finger cast one glance toward the front door whence came the new voice and fell off the steps. It was the merry young man of the shanty-boat episode.

"Gavin, the committee has directed me to order you to close up and travel. It's getting too strong; Indians are coming in after whisky; we won't stand——"

"Whoops!" squeaked Gavin drunkenly. "There you said it, Harper, you won't stand it, eh? Well, get busy then. Come in here, you four-flusher, come in and I'll tear that piece of tin off your vest and make you eat it."

"You've got twenty-four hours to close up and move," said the young man quietly. "Then it's your play to shove your boat up-river."

"Twenty-four hours, eh? Then what'll you do, Jack Harper? Tell me; what'll you do if I'm still here, eh?"

"Move you," said Harper and went on his way.

Kis-ke-net sat like a turtle in the sun until Gavin came lurching toward the back door.

"You want Kis-ke-net kill him?" His head moved ever so slightly in the direction which Harper had vanished. "Kis-ke-net hi-yu bad-man today."

Gavin's glazed bloodshot eyes met the murderous black optics of the red man and what he saw there held his drunken attention.

"You —— skulking bum get out of my place," he squeaked loudly.

Hustling the Indian out he suddenly thrust him into a back room and shut the door.

"Eh?" he said, leaning forward fiercely.

"Gimme hooch," grunted Cut Finger. "Lots hooch. That man no be here tomorrow."

Gavin swallowed hard at the sight of unfathomable rage that lurked in the Indian's eyes.

"That's enough," he whispered. "Don't you say another word about it to me. How you going to—no, no! I don't want to know. Here!" He produced a large flask

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of liquor. "Take this and get out. There'll be more if you do it."

"More now."

"Eh?"

"More hooch. One bottle sleep me; one other bottle wake me up. Make me strong; do job."

With his two bottles stowed in his shirt, Kis-ke-net slunk out of the settlement.

He sat down in an open space up on the hillside and began to drink. The devilish stuff in the bottle blotted out the human qualities in his brain and left active only the animal instinct to kill. It fired his heart till he was brave, it distorted his face as he drank, and presently he fell asleep, his eyes half open, his lips drawn up in a leer.

He awoke when the mosquitoes began to bite with the coming of darkness. He put the second bottle to his lips, and when he had half emptied it he was ripe to begin his work. Soft-footed and crouching he came down the hillside to the river bank and the shanty-boat. It was a dark night, but Cut Finger found a safe hiding-place and crouched, waiting.

His savage instinct, alert from hate, whisky and darkness, told him that the boat was empty and he slipped noiselessly into the water and circled the craft, feeling for fastenings and finding that they consisted of two heavy hemp cables lashed around stumps on the bank. He was so well satisfied that when he returned to his hiding-place he took a small drink to celebrate.

Kis-ke-net waited patiently. He was familiar with the white man's ways, knew that they worked hard all day, foregathered in the settlement for the evening, then separated for their various abodes. He would have waited a day, two days, a week if necessary. There was nothing else in the world for him but revenge.

The mosquitoes feasted upon him unmolested, so still did he sit. They disappeared, as is their wont, when the night grew old, and a red moon showed a tiny gleam above the fir trees. The moon dropped out of sight; the night was at its blackest; then his man came.

Even in the dark, Cut Finger knew him by his height and build. He came staggering down the trail, slipped on the landing planks, staggered on to the boat, thrust the door in with his shoulder and stumbled heavily inside.

Cut Finger crawled closer. He heard the man in the cabin rise and throw himself on a bed. Presently there were snores. Kis-ke-net waited until the sounds told him that the drunken slumber of his victim was complete. Then he slipped into the water and cut the ropes.

The house-boat rode motionless in shallow back-water out of reach of the river current. With all his strength Kis-ke-net shoved gently, oh, so gently. The boat moved. It rode easily. Out toward the current it went. Kis-ke-net was up to his neck, wading. Gently he steered the boat down-stream. He followed until he felt the suck of the water going over the falls. Then with all the strength in him he thrust the boat out into the current.

He ran down the trail and was at the falls when the boat went over, but he did not hear a single cry.

IT WAS well into the middle of the forenoon next day when Kis-ke-net awoke and made his way to Gavin's back door. The place was crowded again, and again he sat himself down on the back stairs to wait. He was in great need of whisky, and he cast sidelong glances anxiously into the barroom in search of Gavin. Presently he became aware that it was a very quiet crowd. There was a cloth over the bar and there was no man behind it. Gavin was not in sight. Presently a shout came from the loafers at the front door.

"They got him! They're bringing him here!"

Kis-ke-net rolled off the steps as the crowd parted at the door and a man stalked in.

"Put him here, boys, on the roulette table; he'll never need it any more now, poor guy. He was a tough one, but he's gone now, and we won't say anything hard against him."

Cut Finger's eyes raised slowly above the back steps and made sure that the man who spoke was Harper. Harper held in his hand a board with crude lettering on it, the lettering which Cut Finger had seen above the house-boat door, and which he had been unable to read.

"We found poor Gavin hung up on a rock down-stream," continued Harper. "This is all we found of his boat. We might put it on his grave, eh?"

He laid the board beside the dripping bundle on the green table where all might read:

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Dan Gavin's—Keep Out. This means You.

"Kind o' lucky for you, Jack, that that fool Indian left his moccasin-tracks on the bank," said one of the crowd. "He must have been awful stewed. It might have looked bad for you, after the words you 'n' Dan had."

A shout brought the crowd rushing to the back door. Cut Finger had tried to flee, but the returning posse had spied him ere he could reach the bush.

He maintained typical Indian stolidity during his trial. When he was led away, his sentence, in view of all circumstances, being modified to life imprisonment, he spoke briefly and to the point:

"Ugh! Hooch! Bad medicine!"

GETTING PROTECTION

by ED. L. CARSON

"BOOBS! Yawps! Boneheads! That is what the Northwest Mounted Police are."

The individual in the near-loud garments who had boarded the west-bound at a small prairie station on the Canadian Pacific Railway with only a furtive look for baggage, spoke with warmth and conviction. An amused though skeptical smile spread over the faces of his audience in the smoker, and an explanation was requested.

"Look at what they did to me," he demanded. "I follow the fairs for a living and when I heard of a big celebration called the 'Cutting Out' to be held at Calipeg I thought I saw a chance to pick up a piece of change. I knew that the Canadians were slow but inclined to be dangerous when roused, so I decided to square myself with the bulls before beginning operations. All I could find in this line was two men in red coats and blue pants who seemed to apologize for being there at all, judging from the quiet and self-effacing way they were going around. One of them had a stripe on his sleeve which showed him to be the main guy, so I took him aside and slipped him a double sawbuck.

" 'What is this?' he asked, just as if he had never seen real money before.

" 'Can't you guess?' I grinned.

" 'Oh, I see. Some lost money you have found.' Honest, he said that just as if he had made me the first time.

" 'It will be lost if you don't find some other place to carry it besides your open hand,' I came back.

" 'Do you mean it for me?' he asked, as if he had never thought of such a thing till that minute.

" 'I gave it to you, didn't I?'

" 'But what is it for?' he persisted.

"I saw that I would have to say it over in small words for him and even spell some of them at that, so I explained that I was running a little game in which the other fellow stood to lose and that in case any of the Reubens got hot I wanted protection.

" 'I see,' he declared, as solemn as a young turkey. 'You are afraid that the ranchers will accuse you of unfairness when you win their money and wish me to take care of you.'

" 'You've got it,' I admitted.

"Do you know what he did? He took me down to the jail and, after telling me that this was the safest place for me that he knew of, he locked me up and kept me there during the whole celebration. The Cutting Out wound up last night, so this morning he came to the door of my cell and hands me this:

" 'The danger seems to have passed, so I think you may come out now without fear. Those ranchers you were afraid of have all gone home, so you will probably need no more protection. As a measure of safety, however, I would suggest that you leave town on the next train since you run a certain amount of risk in remaining where you have so many ill-wishers.'

"The way he said it was enough for me. I caught the train all right and never asked what became of my working outfit, for the sooner I can get to some place where the police know something the better I will be pleased. But wasn't that the limit of stupidity? Just think of him turning that twenty over to the Government when he might just as well have salted it down and said nothing, the blamed bonehead."

"Bonehead is right," declared a quiet-looking Canadian, but he was looking squarely at the tinhorn when he said it.

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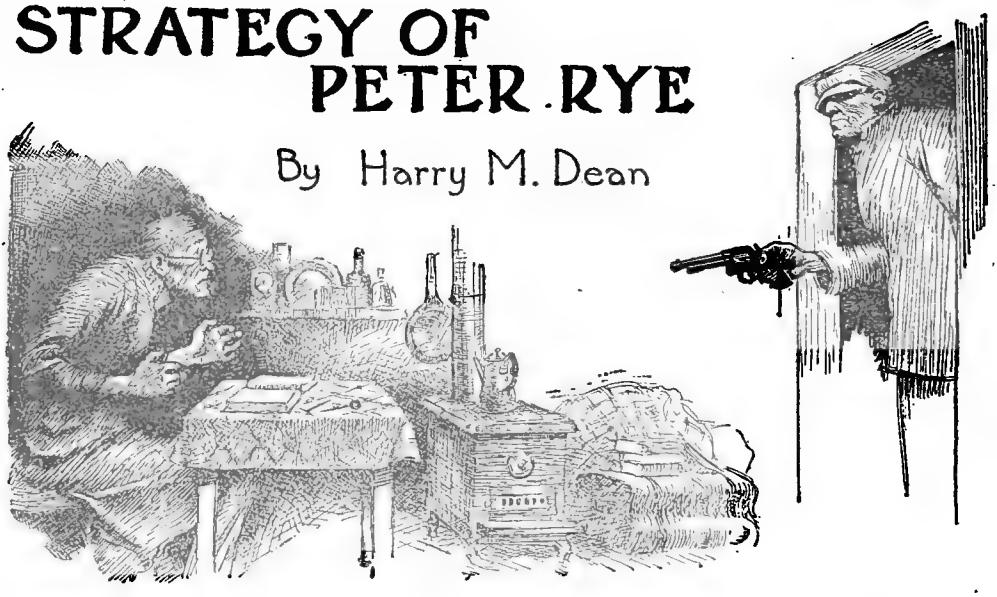
STRATEGY OF PETER RYE

By Harry M. Dean



PETER RYE was an enigma. Only a mere few there were who claimed to know what he was. After-events proved these few to be wrong.

He had been a part of the city's life for a great many years, so gray-haired, aged men would tell you, yet they could not name the time of his coming. He gave one the impression of something long-established, of firmness. He and his place of business were permanent fixtures—part of the city itself—like, one might say, the city hall or the post-office.

Peter Rye was a small man, and there was about him the vague suggestion of great age, though his actions did not to any great degree sustain this impression. It was as though his soul showed itself to have been the master of many bodies, but was itself at last becoming acquainted with time.

He had a sharp, cruel, smooth-shaven face, thin lips—lips that always were tight-closed and cold, and the color of blue steel. Above these was a thin, slightly arched nose, and his small, hard and beady eyes were screened by a pair of big, horn-rimmed spectacles. His hair, yellow-white and stringy, escaped from under a tight-fitting red skull-cap. The skin on his face was contorted into many fine wrinkles, while his neck, as he lowered and lifted it in and out of his soiled collar, three sizes too large, was like the neck of a turtle—scaly and red and loathsome.

His hands were like talons—long, bony fingers and dirty, broken nails—and instinctively you knew they were cold, and you shuddered. But he wore, mounted in a heavy gold ring, on the third finger of his left hand a diamond, clear and cold as ice, worth as an easy sale more than a thousand dollars.

His suit once had been black, but age and much usage had now turned it to a raw, red color. When he had business on the street, which was seldom, the red skull-cap gave way to a rusty derby hat of the same age as his suit. His shoes were worn, and often showed fresh traces of his own unskilled attempts at mending. With shoe-polish they were not on speaking terms.

Such was Peter Rye as he appeared to the average observer. But back of those hard, cruel eyes there reposed a brain untarnished by the lapse of time—a brain in which the fires of genius burned. True, it was genius misapplied, but take it as you will, it was that cunning which makes of some men masters of any situation, and dooms others to the obscurity of unfulfilled ambitions.

Peter Rye conducted a second-hand dealer's establishment—a junk-shop, one would say—that was known more or less throughout the city, but more especially in the by-streets and blind alleys where unclean

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urchins and the more mature denizens of ill-smelling hovels told you that Peter Rye would buy anything. This statement being too comprehensive you were, as a matter of course, inclined to doubt it. Nevertheless, Peter Rye's place of business would substantiate rather than contradict this assertion.

The place was in a side street, not far from the main part of the business district, and was one among many small shops in a row of more or less disreputable-looking buildings which had been left in an eddy by the swiftly swirling waters of progressive commerce. You came upon it suddenly, and perhaps lingered for a moment to gaze through the never-too-clean windows at some queer-looking article on display just beyond the dingy glass. Perhaps, urged on by the ever-present spirit of curiosity, you decided to look within.

The entrance to the place was uninviting—a narrow doorway closed by a heavy oaken door, paintless and weather-stained. As you pushed open this door you could not help but note the massive fastenings which secured it. At this you wondered, for Peter Rye was not a man who could by any chance possess any great wealth; either in money or stock in trade.

Once inside the shop, however, as your eyes gradually became accustomed to the semi-darkness therein, you perceived that this was, indeed, a conglomeration of curiosities. It was at this moment that you were in a fair way of believing the statement of the denizens of the by-streets and blind alleys.

The place was a confused jumble of many things. There was no attempt at a systematic display, but objects of almost every description littered the room—hung about on the walls, draped over aged, broken chairs, thrown carelessly on tables, packed in show-cases and piled on packing-boxes which were serving in lieu of counters.

Second-hand clothing seemed to predominate in the place, but there were, in addition to this, musical instruments, watches, clocks, jewelry, tinware, cooking utensils, bedding, pieces of furniture, rugs and other household odds and ends—flotsam from many a wrecked home, no doubt—objects rare and objects worthless.

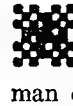
An antique vase of chased silver, a thing of rare beauty and design, stood shoulder to shoulder with a cheap, gaudy-faced clock, while a painting, a beautiful bit of landscape in water-color that was fit to grace the home of some lover of real art, was dishonored by its companion, a meaningless monstrosity of tinted chinaware. A heavy-hafted Spanish machete hung from the same nail that upheld a priest's vestments, and a beautiful bit of tapestry was half hidden by an old, weather-worn coat.

In the rear of the shop proper, a dozen or more cages contained canary-birds, guinea-pigs, white mice and rabbits, while a big red-and-green parrot swung slowly back and forth on its perch, sending forth a torrent of harsh, rasping jargon.

The air was musty and smelled of many things, chiefly moth-balls and the haunting odor of previously prepared meals in which it would seem that onions had predominated. For in a little room at the rear of the shop Peter Rye made his home—cooked, ate and slept.

This room was scantily furnished, containing a combination heating and cooking stove, a small table, a stool, a rocker, over which was thrown a moth-eaten bearskin rug, and a few cooking and serving utensils. Also a cot and a great iron safe. Incongruous this safe seemed amid its surroundings. Massive was the word that described it, with its great steel door, its heavy knob and the shining dial-plate from which every figure had been rubbed until only the smooth, polished metal remained.

As a general thing Peter Rye was to be found at his place of business every day in the week, from early morning until late at night. There were, however, certain momentous occasions when he laid aside his red skull-cap, donned his rusty derby hat and made his way to the central police station, at which place he would be for some little time closeted with the chief of the city's police force, one John MacFarlane.



FOR Peter Rye had a hobby. It was, however, a carefully concealed hobby, and it was known to but one man other than Peter Rye himself. That man was Chief MacFarlane.

Peter Rye was an amateur detective. Not one of the sort that merely plays at catching criminals, but one who made a careful study of some given crime and who, after due time for a thorough investigation, as he himself put it, invariably landed his man.

It was only when some particularly daring

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robbery—always it was a robbery—had been pulled off that was baffling the police beyond a reasonable chance of solution that Peter Rye would offer his services.

For Peter Rye's specialty was the unraveling of mysterious robberies. Nothing else in the criminal calendar had any interest for him. He once had told Chief MacFarlane that a man may commit any one of many different crimes for any one of many different reasons, but that he would steal for but one—and that was because it was born in him and he could not help it. He maintained that he could look in a man's face and tell whether or not he was a thief. Once knowing him to be a thief, it then became an easy matter to prove him so.

On this particular evening—Sunday—Peter Rye had just finished his frugal supper. It was cold outside and a fine snow, mixed with sleet, was slithering down the wind. Peter, seated in his old rocker, which was drawn up close beside the stove, was smoking an old black pipe and reading over for the third time a story in the day's paper which had to do with the recent robbing of the safe in the office of the Consolidated Coal Mining Company, and the murder of their watchman, an Irishman by the name of Patrick O'Sullivan, a man with many years of faithful service.

This robbery, which had occurred on Friday evening of the previous week, had set the whole city to buzzing. It had stirred the police department to extraordinary effort, but so far there had been not a single scrap of evidence upturned which would point to the perpetrators of the crime.

Some time during the night in question burglars had entered the building wherein the Consolidated Coal Mining Company had its offices, evidently using a false key in the lock of the front door, as this later was found to be unfastened. They had rendered the watchman unconscious by striking him on the head with some sort of blunt instrument, probably a black-jack, had opened the safe in a most peculiar manner and had extracted therefrom the sum of thirty thousand dollars.

This sum of money was being kept in the company's safe because the day following was pay-day at their mines, and also a bank holiday. The superintendent of the company had, on the afternoon preceding the robbery, drawn from his bank funds sufficient to meet his pay-roll, had deposited the money in his safe and had placed this in the care of the regular watchman, O'Sullivan.

No one, Peter recalled from previous accounts of the crime, had ever been able to offer a logical account of just what had occurred in the office of the Consolidated Coal Mining Company on the night of the robbery.

A clerk, coming to work early the following morning, had found the body of the stricken watchman stretched on the floor of the main office. Rushing into an adjoining room where the safe was kept, he found the door of the latter standing open. He immediately went to a telephone and reported his discovery to the police authorities.

An ambulance quickly arrived on the scene, and the unconscious watchman was hurried to a hospital. For three days and nights he hovered on that borderland between life and death. Once the nurse who had been detailed to keep a close watch over this particular case suddenly found the patient's eyes open and saw his lips barely moving, as though he were making a desperate but unsuccessful effort to utter some word. This, however, lasted but a few moments. The patient then relapsed into the state of coma from which he had half aroused. An hour later he was dead.

Peter Rye here remembered that this same clerk, Jack Wilson by name, who had first discovered the robbery, often had rummaged among his odds and ends, seeking some curio. Also he recalled that Wilson had been in his shop on the eve of the robbery and had casually mentioned the fact that they were holding thirty thousand dollars overnight in their safe, while in the day's story there was a veiled suggestion that Wilson had, perhaps, murdered the watchman and taken the money.

The police, upon investigation, found that the safe had been opened by means of some powerful chemical action applied about the knob which controlled the combination. This had been bodily removed—melted out, it seemed—leaving a hole through which a man could put his hand.

Members of the police department disagreed as to how the job had been done, some claiming it to be the work of a powerful acid, which had eaten its way through

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the metal, while others held that it had been accomplished by the use of an oxyhydrogen torch. It was the first case of its kind to be pulled off in the city.

It was at this point in the story that Peter Rye heard some one enter the front door, which was unlocked, even though the day was Sunday. Quickly he rose from his chair and glided like a snake from the little back room.

If Peter Rye recognized the human derelict who faced him under the single dingy lamp burning in the little shop, he did not betray the fact.

What he saw was a man on whose lean and haggard face was deeply stamped the indelible impression of crime—a tall, lean, slightly stooped individual, with a pale, thin face covered with a two days' growth of black beard, colorless lips, contracted into a slit of a mouth, and cold, hard eyes.

His clothing was worn, but still retained an air of respectability, while the black-and-tan checked cap, pulled low over his shifty eyes, was but a few days out of stock. Snow clung in patches to his garments, and he wiped the moisture from his cheek with the back of a dirty hand, blinking in the dingy light as his face was for a moment lifted toward the swinging incandescent.

"Well, what do you want?" came from Peter Rye. The sound was like the crossing of rapiers.

"Cap, I've been—up the river—for a while," whined he of the shifty eyes. "I ain't been back long. All the bulls watchin' me. Cain't git no work an'——"

"I don't want that stuff," snapped Peter Rye. His voice was cold; it cut like the biting lash of a whip.

"Well, I got a watch I wanter let go."

He produced from a pocket and handed to Peter Rye a thin, open-face, gold watch.

Peter Rye took the watch, pried open the case and examined it carefully. He then motioned to the man to follow, and once more, with that movement so suggestive of a snake, he glided down the narrow aisle of the shop and soon they found themselves in the little back room.

There they spent five or, perhaps, ten minutes.

A trade was consummated. The stranger, having no further business with Peter Rye, was ready to depart.

In silence they made their way toward the front of the little shop and the man, pausing a moment to pull his cap a bit lower over his shifty eyes, without a word opened the door and slipped out into the night.

Peter Rye returned to his little back room. He removed the red skull-cap and placed on his head the rusty, ancient derby. A problem over which he had been puzzling for several days had suddenly and quite unexpectedly solved itself. He had immediate and important business with Chief of Police John MacFarlane, and he could not afford to lose any time in reaching the central office.

Thus does Fate oftentimes place in a man's hands a ready-made key to a complex situation.

WHEN Peter Rye reached police headquarters, Chief John MacFarlane was not in his office. Peter said he would wait, and took a chair, carefully hiding the impatience that burned within him behind the expressionless mask of his face.

Peter was well aware of the fact that he was under suspicion by certain members of the force as being a man who was on far too intimate terms with dwellers in the underworld. To Peter this made not the slightest difference. Plain policemen were beneath his notice. He dealt with none but the head of the force.

In a little while Chief MacFarlane returned. Peter Rye did not rise from his chair as the chief entered, offering barely a civil greeting.

Chief MacFarlane was a big man—mentally and physically—tall, broad-shouldered, with a round, good-natured face, dark hair and a close-clipped reddish-brown mustache. He had clear, far-seeing blue eyes—the sort of eyes that seem to read one's innermost thoughts as though they were part of a printed page.

He was a jovial man, given to the hearty greeting of his friends, but he did not offer to shake the hand of Peter Rye. To Peter this was as it should be, for he could not remember the time when a man had grasped his hand in friendly fashion.

The chief seated himself in his desk-chair, took from a drawer and lighted a big, black cigar. MacFarlane, even though he was accustomed to handling all sorts of men, and notwithstanding the fact that he had

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on more than one occasion dealt with Peter Rye, was never quite at ease in the presence of this human icicle.

Peter broke a rather long silence.

"Caught the guy that robbed the Consolidated people, yet?"

"No," answered the chief, at the same time blowing a cloud of tobacco smoke toward the ceiling, "I'm sorry to say we have not. But we are working on a new clue—an altogether different lead from the one we have been following, and we are very hopeful of successful results. We require only a little more time, and we'll land the man. The arm of the law is long—it reaches far—and raising the reward to five thousand dollars is sure to spur the police officials of the country to renewed efforts."

"Time! Time! Nothing but time," Peter Rye shot at him. "To hear you talk one would think you had all eternity in which to finish a job. I can spot the man who turned the trick."

"Who's the man?" asked the chief. His voice was little more than a whisper.

"Jakey Meyer," Peter Rye told him, in the same flat, expressionless voice.

"Just out of the State's prison and ready to go back again—this time to the chair, perhaps," mused the chief.

"They're all that way," calmly announced Peter Rye, at the same time producing from an inside coat pocket an envelop from which he extracted several newspaper clippings. He quickly found the one he wanted.

"I'm not claiming any special credit in this case," he continued. "It was too easy. In fact, the man who did this job quite unwittingly placed himself in my hands."

Here Peter Rye's thin lips twisted into that vague suggestion of a smile, or better still, a leer.

"As I was saying," he went on, "Jakey Meyer came into my place tonight, and when I asked him what he wanted he began to tell me he'd just returned from a sojourn in State's prison, that he was in desperately hard luck, and all that sort of stuff.

"'I don't want that,' I told him. 'Well,' he came to the point, 'I got a watch I wanter let go.' He showed me the watch. I looked at it carefully. I discovered inside the case something of great importance. 'Can you read?' I asked. 'No,' he answered. We then went to my back room.

"'Trade you this gun for the watch,' said I, pulling open a drawer in the table and bringing out a cheap firearm. 'Even trade?' he asked, brightening up a bit. 'No,' I said, 'I never trade even. No money for me in that sort of thing. Takes a dollar to turn the trick.' He hesitated a moment, then brought from a pocket several bills and gave me a crisp, new one-dollar note."

"But that doesn't prove anything," the chief put in. "Because a man comes in and trades you a watch doesn't necessarily make him out to be the criminal whom the police of several States are making every effort to capture."

"No, not necessarily," went on Peter, "but this clipping says that Rabold, the Consolidated's superintendent, marked the top and bottom bills of every packet he put in his safe. There's a little v-shaped mark in red ink in the lower left-hand corner, just inside the margin. Is that right?"

He shot a steely glance at Chief MacFarlane.

"It is," the chief admitted.

Peter Rye again brought forth something from the envelop and passed it to the chief.

"That's the bill I got from Jakey Meyer."

The chief took the note and examined it through a glass. He then laid aside the glass and looked again, turning the bill over and over in his hand.

"That's one of the bills, all right," he agreed, looking up at Peter Rye.

"And the watch I got from Jakey Meyer," calmly announced Peter, "was O'Sullivan's watch. It has his name in the back of the case. Here it is."

Peter Rye passed the watch to the chief.

"The murdered watchman's!" boomed MacFarlane, all excitement now. "That settles it."

One naturally would have expected the expressionless mask that served Peter Rye as a face to have shown some sign of animation at the chief's last remark—a self-consciousness of well-directed effort, of a task worth while successfully accomplished.

But no such change manifested itself. If anything, Peter became less interested than at any time during the course of the interview. Almost indifferent, it would seem, as though having performed his part

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of the task, he was ready and willing to trust the remainder to others.

CHIEF MACFARLANE left the room, but he was back in a short time. Nevertheless, Peter Rye knew that an order had gone out to every police captain in the city—that the dragnet already was spread, and even at that moment blue-coated guardians of the peace were beginning to comb the underworld for a heretofore insignificant bit of humanity, but now a pawn in a big game, one Jakey Meyer.

The chief reseated himself at his desk and began leisurely to turn through a card index.

Peter Rye waited. He could not tell himself just why, as there could be no special need for his doing so. He would not be called upon to identify Jakey Meyer, that he knew, for Jakey already was photographed, measured and catalogued. He could never establish any identity other than his own, no matter what effort he might set forth in that direction.

Some little time slipped by. Peter Rye put in stolid silence and the chief still busied himself with his card index.

Suddenly, through the thick silence, the bell of the telephone on the chief's desk jangled discordantly. MacFarlane took the receiver from the hook, listened to a report from some distant district, so Peter judged, gave two or three curt orders, then rang off.

"They've caught him," he announced, as he swung about, facing Peter Rye.

To this interesting bit of information Peter made no reply, but brought forth his old black pipe, while from a pocket of his coat he dug up some musty tobacco which he tamped into the bowl with the end of a dirty finger. This finished, he applied a lighted match and immediately began to impregnate the atmosphere of the little room with vile-smelling tobacco smoke.

Chief MacFarlane left the room, closing the door heavily behind him. Peter paid no attention to this, but continued his smoking.

After a while there came the sound of footsteps outside the door of the little office. The door itself was pushed open and Chief MacFarlane entered. He was followed closely by two policemen who supported between them a third person—a thin, pale individual whom they half dragged, half pushed into the room. Peter Rye glanced up and saw that this man was Jakey Meyer, and Jakey's wrists were very close together and bound by a pair of steel bracelets.

And then it was that Jakey Meyer saw Peter Rye.

Just what had put into Jakey's head the story that presently poured, like an unleashed torrent, from between Jakey's colorless lips, neither the chief nor either of the policemen who had made the arrest could say, for Jakey Meyer was saying strange, unbelievable things.

It appeared that in making a search of Jakey Meyer's person there had been found thereon three one-dollar notes, which had been turned over to Chief MacFarlane. And on each of these notes the chief had discovered the little v-shaped check-mark in red ink in the lower left-hand corner, just inside the margin, thus adding another, and perhaps the strongest link of all, to the chain of evidence which was rapidly forging itself about Jakey Meyer.

But Jakey Meyer was saying, talking wildly and making futile efforts to emphasize his words by gesticulating with his thin, manacled hands, that he had not been in the city the night on which it was said the robbery and murder had been committed; that he had not traded Peter Rye a watch for a gun, giving in addition one dollar in money, but that he had sold Peter Rye a watch—one he had owned for a number of years—for five dollars. Peter Rye, he said, had given him this amount in one-dollar bills, three of which he still had in his possession at the time of his arrest.

He stoutly maintained that he knew nothing of the robbery and murder in the office of the Consolidated Coal Mining Company, and that his being connected with the affair was nothing more than a frame-up to send him back to prison.

His black eyes blazed like coals of living fire. His voice, rasping at first, settled to a passionate plea for justice, and Peter Rye, closely watching Chief MacFarlane in order to determine what effect Jakey's story was having, saw flit across that officer's face, like a gray, swift-moving cloud across the face of the sun, a vague belief that Jakey Meyer was telling the truth.

Peter Rye felt that his reputation as a criminal investigator was at stake, for it

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seemed that Jakey's story was rapidly undermining the foundation of his structure of evidence.

But in a moment the shadow was gone from the face of the chief, and Peter Rye heard his own breath escape from beneath his clenched teeth with a faint sibilation.

For, upon being asked if he could prove his whereabouts on the night of the robbery and thus establish an alibi, Jakey said he had spent the night in a freight-car in a neighboring city, but as he naturally was not courting company, he could furnish no proof to substantiate this fact. This proved, beyond any chance of doubt, that Jakey was lying and his case was lost.

They were leading the man away to his cell. Peter Rye had risen from his chair, the stem of his old black pipe ground between closely clenched teeth, when Jakey Meyer suddenly turned his venomous anger full upon him.

"You're the guy that done this," he screamed, pointing his manacled hands toward Peter Rye. "You old mummy, with your devil's heart and your faked-up schemes. You're a crook. You'll help to send me up just like you helped to send up Tim Dugan for th' Harrison Street robbery, an' Tim not in town when th' thing was done. But you'll pay—" his voice rose to a screech—"you'll pay. Don't you ever forget that. Tim Dugan told me that just as sure as he ever breathed free air again he'd kill you, just th' same as he'd kill a snake. I've heard that Tim's been pardoned, an' if he has—well, God help you, for Tim never talks half as much as he acts."

And thus Jakey Meyer was led away to his cell, still muttering of Tim Dugan's dire threat of vengeance.

Chief MacFarlane stood for a long moment, gazing straight into the flinty eyes of Peter Rye, but Peter, secure behind his mask of indifference, merely shrugged his rounded shoulders, saying:

"You'll have to go a bit easy with Jakey, Chief. His father died in an asylum, and it seems likely that Jakey may follow in the old man's footsteps."

With this Peter Rye let himself out of the chief's office, passed through a room where half a dozen policemen gazed at him with expressions of mingled awe and contempt, and at last found himself in the street.

THE cold air, fanning his face, refreshed and encouraged him. He had, for just a moment, when Chief MacFarlane was showing undue interest in the wild, improbable tale which Jakey Meyer was telling, felt faint. It had been stuffy in the chief's office, and the tobacco smoke was nauseous. His own pipe was vile and he must remember to get a new one. And then, suddenly, there rose up and struck him, as a blow full in the face, Tim Dugan's threat.

Peter Rye had not the slightest doubt but what Tim Dugan had told Jakey Meyer just what Jakey had said. He had been the chief instrument in sending Dugan, a desperate sort, to prison for the robbery of a Harrison Street jewelry shop. He had not succeeded in getting for him the lengthy sentence he had hoped for, and now, to make matters worse, the authorities had given Tim a pardon. He would come away from prison not a broken, but a bitter man.

For the first time in his life Peter Rye had felt the icy hand of fear clutching at his heart. He did not like the sensation.

And so with these thoughts bulking big in his brain he came at last to his own front door. He wished for his electric torch which he had forgotten to take with him, but his long, slender fingers closed around the haft of a heavy automatic pistol, resting in his coat pocket, and he absorbed courage therefrom.

First, he tried his door, making sure it was fastened. He then inserted his thick key, gave this a turn, heard the grating of the heavy lock, then cautiously pushed open the door and entered. He was compelled to take several steps in order to reach the first drop-light. He crept forward. All was silent within. He wondered why the big red-and-green parrot did not set up its sharp, rasping cries, then concluded it must be asleep on its perch.

He found the switch, snapped it on and flooded the room with a rather dingy, but nevertheless welcome, light.

He locked and barred his door, then made his way toward the rear of the shop. His eyes, roving this way and that, passed along the row of cages and came to the perch usually occupied by the big parrot. The perch was empty.

Then, almost beneath his feet, an object caught his eye. It was the body of the parrot. The bird was dead. He turned

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it over with his foot, then stooped and examined it with his hands. The body was limp, the neck-feathers rumpled, but Peter thought he still could detect a slight warmth beneath the thick down on the breast.

Peter was, in a cold sort of way, very much attached to his pet. It never had failed to welcome him as he entered the shop each morning, nor to bid him goodnight at closing time.

At first he could not account for the bird's death. Then it came to him that birds die, just the same as other creatures. And the parrot no doubt was getting old, as it had been in his possession for a great many years.

Dismissing all thoughts of the dead bird from his mind, he made his way to the little back room, and there he threw a switch that put out the lights in the shop.

Peter Rye sat down in the old rocker, then loaded and lighted his pipe. After a bit he rose and went to the big safe, which he opened. From a compartment therein he brought forth a book—of the sort used by folk who keep diaries—bound in red leather. Many pages of this book were covered with writing, done in a fine, even hand. Returning with this he found pen and ink, sat down at the table and began to write.

For some time he wrote slowly, painstakingly, often pausing as though groping for just the proper delicately shaded expression which he required.

Then, having finished with his writing, he began to read over that which was written in the little book, going slowly, sometimes turning back a page for the reperusal of its contents.

Often at night Peter Rye would bring forth the little leather-bound book and spend an hour or so poring over its pages. It was a never-ending delight to him. Frequently while reading he would pause a moment, smiling his queer, twisted smile, while into his hard, beady eyes there would come a gleam of triumph.

It was as though an artist gloated over the never-ceasing wonder of some masterpiece which he had created. Thus one could know that a record of all the pleasure which Peter Rye ever had wrested from life was set down between the covers of the little red book.

And, as Peter Rye sat engaged in the pleasant pastime of reading and remembering, a strange sound, soft as the tread of a cat, fell lightly upon his ears. His right hand slipped into his pocket to grasp the heavy-hafted pistol resting therein, while at the same time his eyes raised themselves from the little red book on the table to the level of the doorway leading to the little shop.

A man stood framed in this doorway—a giant of a man, so it seemed to Peter Rye—and he held in his tense, outstretched right hand a heavy, blue-steel revolver. The rays from the single drop-light burning above the table played over the long, polished barrel, and Peter Rye was looking squarely into the sinister black hole in its muzzle.

AT EXACTLY 8:45 on the morning following the arrest of Jakey Meyer, Chief of Police John MacFarlane received a telephone message from a man who said his name was John Doe. The message was to the effect that if Chief MacFarlane would go to the shop occupied by Peter Rye he would find there something which would be of great interest.

Part of this evidence, so the informer had said, would be found in a little leather-bound book which was lying open on the table in the little back room of the shop, while the remainder, equally as important, would be found in the big safe in the same room.

Chief MacFarlane demanded to know how he who styled himself John Doe had come into possession of such information, but in a moment he discovered that he was talking into a disconnected telephone.

The chief rang Central, endeavoring to learn just where the call had come from. After a brief delay he was informed that it had been sent from a pay station on the outskirts of the city—a telephone instrument in a little pagoda which the street-railway company maintained for the convenience of its patrons who were compelled to wait at that point for transfers. Calling the place failed to bring a response.

Acting on the information already received, Chief MacFarlane hastened to his waiting automobile, and was soon speeding toward that part of the city wherein Peter Rye had his little shop.

Chief MacFarlane was at a loss to understand the message which he had received. At first he had a vague idea that it had

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come from Peter Rye himself, and was but a queer way Peter had of calling him to the little shop for a conference, probably having something to do with the case of Jakey Meyer. He then recalled that his informer had mentioned that the evidence would be found in a leather-bound book and in the big safe. It could not have been Peter Rye who had called.

And with these confusing thoughts still bumping about in his brain, the chief came to the front of the little shop. There was an air of suspense, of charged silence, about the place. He noted this as he alighted from his automobile and suddenly he recalled what Jakey Meyer had said about Tim Dugan. Had Tim already carried out his dire threat of vengeance for what he supposed to be a grievous wrong? Had information which he, the chief, accepted as true from Peter Rye, been false? And just what was Peter Rye, anyway?

Not knowing just what he would find inside, the chief approached the weather-beaten front door and turned the knob. The door was locked. Repeated blows on the panels failed to arouse any one, and the chief ordered his chauffeur to force an entrance.

Now this was an order that was much easier given than fulfilled. Though the chauffeur, who was a husky lad, threw his full weight against the door several times, it steadfastly refused to yield. Not until some one brought an ax was any degree of progress made.

Finally the heavy door gave way under the repeated blows of the ax in the hands of the chauffeur. The chief, ordering the crowd which had collected to keep away from the door, went into the building.

The interior of the little shop was dingy and choked with shadows, though it was a bright day outside. The chief snapped the switch of a drop-light swinging just above his head, but no answering gleam followed this movement. Cautiously he made his way toward the rear of the shop.

Passing down the narrow aisle, picking his way between boxes, barrels and other bits of junk that impeded his progress, he came at last to a narrow doorway. Going through this he found himself in a small room—Peter Rye's living-room, he judged it to be. There was more light here, as the morning sun rays were boldly projecting themselves through the dingy panes of a window that opened upon a dirty little court.

Chief MacFarlane made a quick survey of the little room, with its battered chairs, rusty iron stove, its table and the few cooking and serving utensils stacked on a shelf near the window. Then his eyes came to rest on the big safe in the corner farthest from the door.

The chief wondered why Peter Rye would need a safe such as this one seemed to be. It was a strong safe, and would have done for service in a bank. It was wide and tall, and one imagined its inner compartment large enough to accommodate the crouching figure of a man.

The chief also was wondering where Peter Rye had gone. Had Jakey Meyer's story so affected him that he had fled? Had Jakey Meyer told the truth when he had accused Peter Rye of being a crook?

And then moving a few paces forward, the chief came to the table and the little leather-bound book lying open upon it. The first sentence upon which his eyes came to focus so impressed him that he seized the little book and began hastily scanning its closely written pages. And as Chief MacFarlane read there came to him, dimly at first, but growing brighter with each succeeding page perused, a great understanding.

Time passed. Once he saw his chauffeur, grown uneasy at the long-continued absence of his chief, peer in at the little doorway. He nodded and the man went away. Finally he closed the little book and carefully placed it in the inside pocket of his coat.

He then examined the safe, grasping the lever and attempting to throw open the heavy door. But there was no answering yield, and then it was he saw how carefully every figure had been rubbed from the dial-plate.

The problem now was to get the safe open. He wondered how Peter Rye had been able to accomplish this after having destroyed the figures on the dial-plate. He knew there were men who claimed to be able to open a safe by listening to the click of the tumblers, but the chief had no desire to prove this at present. He must resort to other methods, even though this would necessarily ruin the safe.

For a safe of this kind can be opened without a combination, given the proper tools and a little patience. The chief

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sought his chauffeur and sent him for aid. In an incredibly short period of time this arrived in the form of a young man with a diamond-pointed drill. This young man was soon engaged in his laborious task of boring a hole through the steel door in such a position that it would liberate the tumblers, thereby allowing the safe to be opened.

Meanwhile, several more policemen had arrived. The front door had been propped in place and now was guarded by a big bluecoat. The young man with the drill kept steadily at his task and finally announced that his work had been completed.

Chief MacFarlane came forward, wondering still just what he was to find in the big safe. The policemen crowded nearer. The young man working with the door gave the lever a tug, the door came open, and he staggered backward against one of the policemen, terror written large in his face, a startled exclamation escaping his lips.

For immediately the big door was opened there had started toward them, and then as though suddenly changing its plan as to direction, had sprawled face downward at their feet in an incongruous, groveling attitude, the twisted figure of a man.

Chief MacFarlane needed but one hasty glance to tell him that the thing at his feet, in its queer, crouching position, head bent low on breast, with its staring, ghastly eyes and crumpled arms, was all that now remained of what once had been Peter Rye.

AGAIN, it was evening. Chief of Police John MacFarlane and half a dozen of his men were sitting in the chief's office. They were discussing the strange case of Peter Rye. The chief had just told them of how Peter had been a master crook, far too clever for himself and his force.

Peter Rye had been the man, so the chief told them, who had pulled off every big robbery which had taken place in the city within the past ten years, including that of the Consolidated Coal Mining Company and the murder of their watchman. This was his only case of murder.

Peter's plan was very simple, as is everything when once we come to understand it. Through his business he was in touch with many criminals and near-criminals. He bought their stolen goods, he knew their whereabouts at all times, and when he needed a man he always had succeeded in planting upon him in some manner enough evidence to convict him, just as he had done in the case of Jakey Meyer.

He laid his plans well. He was like a great general. He left nothing to chance. He would commit some daring robbery, then a little later he would come to the police with the information that he had, by a method which he never would divulge, discovered the perpetrator of the crime. An arrest would be made, evidence bearing out each statement which he had made would be found, and in each case conviction had been an easy matter.

And with that queer mental twist which so often causes a criminal to boast of his cunning, Peter Rye had set down in the little red book a minute record of his handiwork, naming the time and the place, setting forth his method of shifting the crime upon the shoulders of another, name of his victim, notes of the trial and length of the sentence in each case, always ending with a comment on his ability to make fools of the members of the police department.

And the plunder? Kept in the big steel safe until he was able to dispose of it. He bought Government bonds, stocks in various enterprises, and even had confided to the little red book that he would retire from business and leave the city just as soon as he saw Jakey Meyer convicted of the Consolidated Coal Mining Company robbery, and safely behind the heavy bars in State's prison.

"But who killed him, and why?" It was young Claud Barrett, lately come to the force, who put the question.

"That I can not answer," said the chief. "But this I do know. Peter Rye was placed in his safe alive, and left there to die a lingering death. And, to my mind, this was a fitting end for one who had long exercised such a cruel ingenuity as that with which he was cursed."

Silence fell upon the little group of men. After a while the chief went on—

"Gentlemen, for my part—and I speak for the force as well—I am of the opinion that Justice has seen fit to take this case into her own hands, and I have not the slightest desire to apprehend the man who acted as her agent!"

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THE HOUSE OF HIDDEN FACES

A Complete Novelette

BY H. A. Lamb

Author of "Alamut," "The Mighty Manslayer," etc.

IT WASN'T wanderlust that took me on the *Natalie*. I had to have a berth that would put money in my pocket, and the blackbirders paid well. It was in the days before the Queensland labor trade was given up, and the *Natalie* had a license to recruit labor among the South Sea Islands for Queensland, dated 1900. The license was taken out in the name of Bernard Craig, master, and it was Craig gave me my berth.

"You need a recruiter," said I to Craig on the deck of the schooner, "and I don't know the first thing about blackbirding, being an American of wandering disposition, with some education, and a knowledge of sailing craft; but no money. If you can fit me out with a berth that spells grub and a little gold in pocket——"

I remember Craig, who was a slender, sunburned chap, with wide gray eyes and a dark, close-set face, laughed at that. Maybe it was the education part of it—Craig was an Oxford man himself—or maybe it was something else that shipped me on the *Natalie*, a ninety-ton schooner, and a ripe and leaky old scow at that, bound for the New Hebrides.

At the time I didn't suspect the *Natalie* was bound on anything but every-day recruiting—to run down to the islands and pick up as many natives as cared to enlist for Queensland, leaving the return islanders at their homes on the way. I didn't even know the bearings of Vata Lavum, then, and as for the House of Hidden Faces, I'd have laughed at it as at the other ghost stories of traders who try to scare off the new hands with their yarns.

Still, before we'd left Maryborough I heard of John Kerr. One of the Government agents came aboard the schooner and I heard him tell Craig that John Kerr had been wrecked in the *Annie* off Vata Lavum and that the islanders had looted what was left of the cargo.

Neither of the men seemed sorry, and I asked the recruiter, "Brocky Tom" McCracken, who John Kerr was. He looked at me, kind of surprised, and said that Kerr was one of the skippers that had raised the devil with the islanders, trading them gin and old Sniders, and kidnaping them when he got the chance. Kerr was one of the notorious crowd that took what he wanted without fear or decency, gambling with his own life at the time; while Craig was one of the new masters, sailing under Government license.

If you look up the records of Sir Ralph

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Gore, once manager of the Polynesian Department, you'll find Kerr's career in black and white. How he got together the fourteen matched pearls; how he trapped a boatload of Mallicollo islanders in his ship by putting on a white robe and posing as a bishop, thus causing the massacre of the next real bishop that came to Mallicollo; how he wrecked a couple of old hulks which were heavily insured, and other things. Not very nice reading, but it bears on what I ran into at Vata Lavum.

Likewise, there's the Government report at Brisbane concerning the death of St. George Carnie and his daughter, Helen, on the plantation at New Caledonia the year before the *Natalie* sailed. As for what we found on Vata Lavum, there's a document in the Brisbane museum that explains something—very little—about the hillmen of those islands and their witch-doctors.

But nothing about Doctor-Man Cha Tara, or the "white forest" or the crawling sickness. And, so far as I know, no one else in the South Seas has seen the House of Hidden Faces.

Yes, when I curled up in my bunk in the cubby off the cabin of the *Natalie* the first night of the run to the New Hebrides, and felt the swell grip the schooner, I didn't guess it wasn't a recruiting cruise I was slated for—risk enough as that was. They say a man's instincts whisper to him when he's heading into a storm; but I was peaceful enough, with the murmur of the wash, and the snapping of the reef-points and the after-dinner smell of chow from the galley.

To add to my content I saw that I'd shipped with a good company aft. Craig proved to be a silent man, maybe thirty, with a fondness for his own companionship and a lot of books in the shelf over his bunk, ranging from Shakespeare to William Morris, that were a God-send to me. I figured that he had spent at least ten years in the recruiting trade, which is longer than usual. He had left England for some good cause that I didn't ask about. He was a cynical man, inclined to be morose, but just.

I was listed as supercargo, or second mate. The first mate was Hyde, a thin, drinking man, inclined to fevers. He didn't last long. The chap who shared the cubby with me was Brocky Tom McCracken, whom I suspected was the real recruiter, as he had been overseer on one of the New Caledonia plantations. Brocky Tom didn't talk even as much as Craig. He was a giant of a man, six feet two with high, stooping shoulders and a pair of arms that resembled twisted steel cables. His hands were a heavy network of muscled sinews.

Stripped, I've never seen the prize-fighter or fo'c'stle bully that could size up with Brocky Tom. He was slow to speak, but his head was finely shaped, with steadfast dark eyes, and a brown beard carefully trimmed to a point. He had a nasty temper but he didn't quarrel lightly.

Before the schooner started, Brocky Tom earned the hearty respect of the return islanders. Four of the boys had the windlass, which stuck, as they tried to lift the anchor. Brocky Tom McCracken pushed them aside impatiently and bent to the windlass. He laid all his two hundred and twenty pounds of muscle against it, and it began to move with a creak. The islanders chattered excitedly as they saw the windlass spin around under the white man's hands. The chain ran up swiftly but without any anchor on it. The *Natalie* started her trip minus one anchor.

II

IT WAS Brocky Tom who saved my life at Vata Lavum. We'd put into a cove there to land some returns—the last of our passengers, after a quick run from Maryborough. I remember our boat's crew were glad to see the returns on shore and among their people, saying "plenty bad fella boys along shore."

Being in need of fruit and water, Craig remained at anchor in the cove, disregarding the complaints of his boat boys. The next day the vessel's deck was crowded with Vata Lavum islanders, carrying bunches of bananas, yams, fowls and a few pigs.

Craig took some precaution. Vata Lavum was notorious as a danger spot and there were no missionaries on the island; nor, for that matter, any trading-station. When the islanders came to the schooner in their canoes, Craig ordered them to leave their weapons behind when they climbed to the schooner's deck. He watched them from a hammock under the awning aft, with his revolver in a sling at his waist.

McCracken was below, asleep, I guess. Hyde and I were attending to the trade—always a novel thing for me. We handed over sticks of tobacco, strips of calico, beads

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and pipes as the islanders laid down their fruit and fowls. I noticed at the time that Hyde was shaky from the effects of a bottle overnight.

Our boat boys sulked apart, nursing their rifles. Thola, Old Thola, chief of the Vata Lavum men, went aft to chin with Craig in all the glory of his cowrie shell ear-rings that stretched to his shoulders and a gorgeous money belt of pearl shell around his loins. His fuzzy hair was gay with hibiscus flowers and cuckatoo plumes.

It was a hot day and half our boys were asleep under awnings. I noticed that most of the visitors seemed to be flash young bucks. Hyde had always said that it was a danger sign when the islanders left their Marys behind, but he didn't seem to suspect anything this time, owing to the weapons being left in the canoes.

I had laid aside my own rifle, being occupied with the trade. Hyde, as usual had a revolver slung handy. It was his condition that gave the islanders the chance they were looking for. If Hyde had had his wits about him it could never have happened.

As it was, it came all at once. The Vata Lavum men were strung along the deck, looking over our deck fixings with the usual curiosity. The trade was going smoothly. Two of the young men were standing beside Hyde, bargaining over the price they expected for bunches of bananas they held. Craig was laughing at something Thola had said.

Suddenly there was a shrill yell from the after part of the ship where Thola was. It took me by surprise. When I reached for my rifle behind me, it wasn't there. My heart skipped a beat at this, and instinctively, I ducked. Something heavy whistled over my head.

I caught a glimpse of Hyde. It wasn't pleasant, however. Both the young bucks had dropped their banana bunches, and drawn out tomahawks which they had concealed in the fruit. Hyde was down on all fours, hiccupping stupidly, a look of intense surprise on his face, and blood pouring to his shoulders from two deep cuts in his skull where the tomahawks had landed. I saw the two weapons swing up for another blow. Then I caught sight of my gun. It was in the hands of an islander, pointed about two feet from my head. The man was fumbling at the bolt, evidently baffled by the mechanism.

One tomahawk had missed me. The islander who swung it was on top of me for another try. I caught a half glimpse of Craig struggling in the hammock with Thola, while other islanders scrambled over the rail and our own boys came out of their slumbers, too late for the most part, to escape the concealed weapons of our guests.

III

INSTINCTIVELY I grappled with the chap who was trying to work my gun, at the same time wondering how long it would be before I felt a tomahawk on my skull. Then I felt the man go limp, and fall to one side. I picked up my gun from the deck where it had landed and stepped free of the man.

Brocky Tom McCracken had come on deck from the after-house. For the first time I saw him in action with his favorite weapon. It was an iron pipe about a yard in length, and he swung it with the ease of a riding-crop. This pipe had already accounted for the Vata Lavum man that had my gun, and I saw it crash across the faces of the two bucks who had jumped up from poor Hyde. Their faces caved in like a mud bank, and they dropped shivering to the deck.

By this time I had recovered enough from the surprise and shock of it to work the lever of my gun, and I dropped the fellows who were coming over the side. On the deck itself the Vata Lavum crowd was so mixed with our boys that shooting was difficult. Brocky Tom, however, swung his pipe with the methodical precision of a scythe. A couple of the fellows tried to grapple with him. He pushed them away with his open hand and the pipe got in its usual swing.

As the man fought, his face was as calm as usual, except that his eyes were glowing strangely. His perfect muscles worked like a destructive machine. I have been in a few lively free-for-all affairs; McCracken was a master craftsman.

I thought of Craig. One of the boat boys, however, had gone to his assistance and shrewd Old Thola had figured the odds as too heavy and gone over the side. Craig was standing up rather dizzily, his revolver lifted, waiting like me, for something to shoot at.

With the coming of Brocky Tom and his

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iron pipe and the departure of their chief the Vata Lavum men decided to call the battle off, and they dived over the rail, those that were able to, and struck out for the canoes. McCracken caught up Hyde's revolver and did heavy execution, backed by Craig as they pulled away.

I had gone to Hyde's side, and the sight of him sickened me. His head had been split clear to the eyes. He had paid a heavy price for his last night's spree. When the two other men stopped shooting and called off the boat boys who were still blazing away without doing much harm, we took a look over the deck of the *Natalie*.

It looked like a cattle shambles. Four or five of our boys were laid out dead and others had bad wounds from tomahawks. Ten or a dozen Vata Lavum men were keeping them company. Craig was no worse, except for some bruises. McCracken was unscratched.

Well, we buried Hyde the next day on the island. Thola showed up with some of his men, seeming to consider the matter closed. After Craig read the burial service, Thola wanted to say a prayer of his own, but Craig told him to pray for his own soul. Thola was offended at this. He and his people believed a fight or two made no difference among good fellows. We gave him no chance for further treachery however.

As it proved, he had more trouble in store for us.

IV

THAT NIGHT, thanks to the death of poor Hyde, I came to know more of the mission of the *Natalie*. The night was wonderfully mild, with a faint land breeze stirring, bearing the scents of the island flowers. Bright starlight, with a new moon, showed us the wooded slopes of the Vata Lavum mountains, and the pine groves that stretched down to the white sands of the shore. All the mess on the deck had been cleaned up, and the calm that settled over the island reached to the schooner.

The fight of a day ago was only an incident in the life of a recruiter. Hyde had paid for his drunkenness with his life. The incident was closed as far as he was concerned. But it had an important bearing in my position. It got Craig to tell me what he planned to do at Vata Lavum.

I had been doing a little thinking myself. You see, for a recruiting vessel, the *Natalie* was behaving strangely. We hadn't taken an islander on board since leaving Maryborough, nor had Craig and the others tried to do so. The vessel was empty except for the crew of Kanakas, for we had not even loaded with copra or sandalwood. Moreover, Vata Lavum was a bad spot for recruiting, as we had seen.

Craig, McCracken and I sat out on deck with our pipes, watching the soft shape of the island. I was bewitched by its perfume, and the sound of waves touching against the beach. Craig's voice, when he spoke, was tuned to the stillness of the night.

"Bailey," he said slowly, and McCracken leaned forward to listen, "we are shorthanded now. You will be mate in Hyde's place. I have watched you, and you are able to handle a ship. Moreover, you can be depended on to follow out orders. That is why I brought you along. I thought you would steady Hyde, when we are gone. McCracken and I are going to leave the schooner."

I said nothing to this, waiting to see what the man had back of his words.

"You'll have to know more of our plans, Bailey," he went on in his quiet voice, "if we're going to leave you in charge of the *Natalie*. We can't let Hyde's death stand in the way of what we have come for. Probably you've drawn some conclusions of your own about the *Natalie*. We aren't on a recruiting cruise."

He paused as if to give me a chance to speak, but I waited. It's always been my policy to let the other man speak first. It was Craig's ship and his cruise. Naturally I was anxious to learn what he had to say; still, I waited.

"You've probably heard at Maryborough about John Kerr," continued Craig. "The story got around how he was wrecked on Vata Lavum with the *Annie*. This time, his ship wasn't insured. If he lost her, it was not of his doing—as it has been in the past. John Kerr's record is black, both as recruiter and trader."

"Aye," said McCracken suddenly, "John Kerr has innocent blood on his head."

Something in the big man's growl caused me to wonder if he had a score against the skipper named John Kerr.

"Kerr was a notorious master," explained Craig, puffing at his pipe. "and if he met his fate off Vata Lavum, it was none too bad

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for him. But I will not say he is dead until I see his body. We have made the circuit of the island, Bailey, and there was no wreck to be seen. Of course, the *Annie* might have gone down in the Malo Pass. But the odds are in favor of the Vata Lavum reefs. All we could find out was that the *Annie* was sighted standing in to Vata Lavum a couple of months ago, and has not been reported since. John Kerr may have died on the island. If he did, the matched pearls are with him."

"Those pearls are worth at least a thousand pounds apiece, and there are fourteen of them, all mates. Together, they would make a royal necklace, valued at little short of twenty thousand pounds in London. A year ago at Mr. St. George Carnie's plantation, New Caledonia, Tom had a look at the pearls. No doubt of their value. Kerr had them with him when the schooner was wrecked, for he always wore them in a leather sack around his neck."

"No other man would do that," put in McCracken, stirring in his chair, "but John Kerr sailed without a white mate, and he carried a handy revolver. The islanders fear him."

They were silent at that, as if to hear what I would say.

"You think the pearls can be reached?" I pondered aloud. "But haven't others the same idea?"

McCracken laughed deep in his chest.

"Aye, that may be," he said, as if pityingly. "But few will come to Vata Lavum, Mr. Bailey, and fewer still will go into the interior."

"Kerr dropped a hint at New Caledonia," explained Craig, "as to where his *humpy* was. He has some place of refuge in the interior of Vata Lavum, back of the hills. Rather a coincidence, Bailey, that his schooner was wrecked here. I don't know. Still if John Kerr is dead, there is a chance that his body is at the place he spoke of. It's worth taking a chance. It's risky, because the hillmen of Vata Lavum are more dangerous than the people of old Thola. McCracken and I are going to make the try."

He was silent for a moment, as if thinking what to say next. Somehow his words struck me as sounding a deeper note than appeared on the surface. Craig did not speak lightly.

"You'll be on the schooner, Bailey," he resumed, "when we go after the pearls. We'll pull off in the night, to escape the attention of Thola and his men and strike into the interior. It may take us three or four days. If we are not back in a week, take the *Natalie* to the trading-station at Mallicollo and send for orders to Maryborough. Keep the schooner snug. Thola won't bother you again."

My heart sank a bit at that. A week alone on the schooner with the Kanakas wasn't a cheery prospect. But, knowing the character of the two men who talked with me, I didn't try to get them to give up their trip to the island. Craig stood up, and McCracken rose, stretching his great bulk like a dog.

"Keep your rifles handy in the cabin," added Craig, "and consult Waritai, head of the boat crew, if anything goes wrong on the schooner. He's sailed with me for a good many years, and you can trust him. You'll take my cabin, of course."

Well, that was about all they said to me before they pulled off. They had planned to go that night after the pearls, and shortly after eight bells we manned the whaleboat and landed Craig and McCracken on a point the other side of the cove.

Craig turned and waved good-by before they struck the brush. I saw his slender figure outlined against the sand beside the bulk of McCracken; then they disappeared. I was now in charge of the *Natalie*.

After seeing all was well on the schooner, I left Waritai with another boy on watch with orders to call me if anything turned up, and with rather a heavy heart carried my blankets and kit into Craig's cabin. Before turning in, however, I had a mind to take a look on deck.

The other boy was asleep already, stretched in Craig's hammock, but Waritai was by the lantern slung at the helm. I could see him distinctly. He had set up a totem or sacred image of some kind in front of him on the deck and was kneeling, with closed eyes. Rocking back and forth on his haunches, he seemed to be praying.

V

THE NEXT five days passed without signs of Craig and his companion, although Waritai and I kept up a close watch through binoculars. We saw plenty of Vata Lavum men on the

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beach and occasionally their canoes passed near us. Either because they hadn't noted the absence of the two white men, or were afraid to repeat their attack of a week ago, they gave us a wide berth.

We didn't sight any schooners. Vata Lavum was not favored as a recruiting ground, and it was out of the usual routes to the islands or Australia. As we had plenty of food, we didn't go ashore except occasionally and heavily armed to refill the water-casks.

It was the first time I had had a schooner to myself, but I didn't enjoy the five days overmuch. I missed Craig's friendly smile and his brilliant talk when he roused himself out of his reveries. The man was a thinker, as I found when I read through some of the books on his shelf. With the books were loose note-books of essays which showed the man had been a scholar, and had lived among gentlemen.

How had he come to the South Seas? What had led him to stay in the labor trade, as perilous as it was sordid? Why had he chosen Brocky Tom for his mate? And why had Tom left New Caledonia for the deck of a schooner, where he was not at home?

These were some of the questions I asked myself during those five days. Craig was a gentleman born. I was a wanderer, an American of some twenty-five years and as many trades. Almost I was a fly-by-nighter. Yet, much as I loved the spell of the islands, I would not have stuck to recruiting as Craig did.

I thought I saw the answer to my first question, and perhaps to the second one day when I found a worn volume of Pascal, with a half-erased name on the fly-leaf. Other volumes had similar names rubbed out; this however, could be deciphered. The first name was Bernard, but the second and third were an English family name among the nobility that I had often seen in the papers.

Waritai's conduct, too, puzzled me. The boy spent most of his time on deck with the binoculars. At times, however, he would hint around for an invitation to come to my cabin. Once there he would pretend to clean the rifles, eying me the while out of a rolling glance uncertainly. Several times he seemed on the point of saying something important, but thought better of it.

The evening of the fifth day, when a tropic shower was deluging the deck, he worked himself up to the point of speaking.

"Marster Craig," he began, "him stop altogether too long shore. Him stay five days now with bad fella along shore. Marster Craig, him big fella man. Big devil-devil blong hills. Little devil-devil belong white men. Him stop too long."

"Mr. Craig him big fella, Waritai," I answered, wondering what the boy had on his mind. "Him take rifles altogther, with big fella Brocky Tom. Vata Lavum men tackle 'em, my word, get seven bells knocked out of 'em."

Waritai's vocabulary was limited, but he was anxious to speak.

"Marster Craig," he asked curiously, "him say what for stop along shore?"

"Yes, Waritai. Him get pearls plenty quick. Pearls belong Marster Kerr. Him dead, we get pearls in the hills. Wait, Mr. Craig come schooner plenty quick."

The boy stared at me and shook his head.

"Marster Kerr, him not dead, altogether, my word. Him alive."

This was news to me and I pricked up my ears. But Waritai apparently based his statement on the fact that John Kerr was supposed to be in league with the doctor-men, or witch-doctors of the island, and under their protection. I asked Waritai if these doctor-men were among Thola's people, and he said no. The doctor-men, he said, were in the hills. They were "plenty bad altogether." He went on to describe something that sounded like the "white forest" and a sickness which lurked beyond the hills.

One important fact, however, I got out of Waritai. Craig had not really believed that Kerr was dead. He had some information to the contrary. This puzzled me at the time, for the master of the *Natalie* didn't seem to me to be the kind of man who would go after another man's pearls. He might, of course, have gone to buy them. But was Kerr the man who would sell his treasures? It was a mix-up that I dismissed after a moment. Not so Waritai.

"Marster McCracken come along schooner at New Caledonia," he insisted. "After him come along schooner, Marster Craig sail, sail all the time after Kerr. Him write, write all the time along log-book. You look log-book, you see, big fella. You see why him sail after Kerr. First him go

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Queensland, plenty quick; then Vata Lavum."

I thought at first that Waritai had Craig's essays in mind, but the boy pointed to the desk which stood in the cabin, locked. At that time I did not feel privileged to open the desk. Later I did so.

So passed the first five days on the *Natalie*. And the next two. Still, there was no sign of the two men.

VI

IT WAS the seventh night on the anchored *Natalie* that I came to learn more of the mission of Bernard Craig, and the strange events that had brought him to Vata Lavum. And it was what I learned then that took me to the hills of Vata Lavum, to the *mlurga* gates, and to the white forest. Perhaps it might have been better if I had not opened Craig's desk or listened to Waritai, but I think not. It enabled me, after a fashion, to do him a service.

That night the rain poured down on the cove and the island in torrents, cutting off our view of the shore, Waritai and I taking refuge in Craig's cabin.

I tried to interest myself in a book of verse. One poem, by Coleridge, I found to be marked in pencil. The one that begins:

> In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
> A stately pleasure dome decree
> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man,
> Down to a sunless sea.

Somehow the verse got on my nerves, or maybe it was waiting for the two men that didn't come. Anyway, I turned to Waritai, resolved to find out what the boy knew about Craig's pursuit of Kerr.

"What for Marster Craig him stop along New Caledonia, Waritai? What happened along new Caledonia and along big fella Brocky Tom?"

Waritai puckered his brow and shot a glance out into the cabin to see if we were alone.

"Him stop along new Caledonia by Marster Carnie's plantation," he explained. "Black fellas they raise —— along Marster Carnie. They fight 'em white fellas and kill Marster Carnie, maybe."

Little by little I got the full story out of him, or as much as he knew of it. Carnie and his daughter owned a large plantation on the island where traders were in the habit of stopping. Carnie was hard on his laborers, and they hated him. But the white man took precautions and until after Kerr's visit with the pearls there had been no trouble.

Waritai did not know whether Kerr had tried to sell the pearls to Carnie. But the boy knew that the house had been attacked by the islanders. Carnie had been surprised in bed and literally cut to pieces. Brocky Tom, who was heartily feared by the islanders, fought his way through the blazing house, looking for Carnie and his eighteen-year-old daughter, Helen. The big overseer found Carnie's body, but he did not discover the girl before he was forced to jump from the structure, as the upper floor caved in under the flames.

Brocky Tom had escaped to a neighboring plantation, where he had assembled some white traders and returned to search the grounds. Most of the blacks, terrified by what had happened, had taken to the brush. Several were caught. They declared, however, that the attack on the house had been carried out by a few Vata Lavum islanders who were among the laborers. Waritai bore out the truth of this.

The *Natalie*, he declared, had got wind of the massacre at New Caledonia within a month and had put in there at once. Craig, he said, had been there often before. After a while Brocky Tom brought himself and a few effects on board the schooner and the *Natalie* cruised around the Loyalty Islands, eventually fetching up at Maryborough. But since his visit to New Caledonia, Craig had given up recruiting, much to Waritai's disgust.

The boy declared that Craig had been following the *Annie*, Kerr's schooner, without meeting up with her. Waritai wound up by advising me to look in the log-book in the desk, where Craig had made entries every day.

When I objected to this, Waritai scowled impatiently.

"Marster Craig stop altogether too long along hills," he said vehemently. "Vata Lavum *tabu* for white fella men, my word. You look along log-book, big fella. You see Marster Craig go along *mlurga* gates maybe. What for you no look log-book when maybe Marster Craig him not come back at all along schooner, my word?"

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There was no doubt that Waritai was anxious about the fate of his master, also that he was losing hope of seeing him again. If Craig was actually in danger on Vata Lavum, at the *mlurga* gates, whatever they were, or elsewhere, the log-book might give me some clue as to where he was.

That was how I justified myself in forcing open Craig's desk that night, after I had dismissed Waritai. I assured myself that the master of the *Natalie* had said that he would return before the seven days were up, and it was my duty to learn his whereabouts, if possible.

The desk was a small one, built in against the side of the cabin, under the bookshelf. It contained some money in a compartment, and the ship's papers in a safety-box which was open. A few letters addressed to Bernard Craig, Maryborough, and postmarked London, I did not touch. They were mostly several years old and bore marks of much handling. It was a narrow thread, this batch of letters that tied Craig to his old world, and I guessed that they held the secret of his exile. It was his secret, though, and I left them undisturbed. My attention was drawn to two or three sturdy leather volumes that formed the log-book of the *Natalie* for the past years. The most recent of these I opened, and it was not long before I had found the date which marked the schooner's stop at New Caledonia.

VII

THE entries, however, in a small, scholarly hand, were brief here, merely stating that the schooner remained at anchor in a certain cove. Brocky Tom's coming was duly noted.

At this point, however, the entries dealt with the run to the Loyalty Islands and noted the course of the *Annie*. Craig seemed to be disappointed that he had not caught up with the other schooner. He had returned to Maryborough for supplies, and for news of Kerr. There he had heard of the wreck off Vata Lavum. An entry mentioned my coming, as supercargo.

"I am glad to have a companion to talk to," one of the entries ran after the usual notes on the course, weather and other things, "even if Brocky Tom is against taking a stranger on our trip."

During the run down to Vata Lavum, Craig seemed despondent. His entries here became puzzling.

"It is a small chance," one ran, "after the massacre at the plantation, and the wreck of the schooner, but so long as there is the chance I will not turn back. It gives me some hope that Brocky Tom found nothing in his search through Carnie's house."

This might refer, I thought, to the pearls. Carnie might have bought them of Kerr. Yet Craig had said that Kerr had them with him. Had the outlaw skipper regained his property in the sack of the plantation?

"So far," another entry read, "we have no certainty that we are right in following the *Annie*. Still, Brocky Tom is sure that he is right. And Kerr always kept people off the schooner."

A further entry was still more puzzling.

"It was disappointing not to learn more at Queensland. Natives have the belief that the pale dwarfs exist. No white traders have seen them. The Government agents think I am a little cracked. Waritai knows something about the hillmen of Vata Lavum, but he shuts up when I question him about how to get to them, except to say the *mlurga* gates are *tabu* for white men, and to beg me to stay away. Superstition, of course. It will take more than that to stop me, or Brocky Tom."

There was a good deal I didn't understand here. Why did Craig go after the pearls when he believed Kerr was alive? What had taken him to the hills of Vata Lavum?

"It seems that we have to guard against the crawling sickness," the log-book went on, "which is probably either a tale of the witch-doctors of the interior, or some of their pestilential poisons. I have reason to know poisoning has become a fine art in the New Hebrides, especially in Ambrym and Vata Lavum. As to the *mlurga* gates, I have a theory of my own. If we ever catch Kerr the reckoning will be heavy. Still, how can we be certain? We have had no news since the massacre. The hills of Vata Lavum are our only hope."

"I have discovered that Kerr is alive," an entry marked Mallicollo read, "and the wreck of the *Annie* must have been a lie. The hills of Vata Lavum will tell us what we want to know. God willing, we shall find out. What a slender hope it is! Yet it is all I have to live for. Brocky Tom lives to get his hands on John Kerr. I will leave that to him."

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At this point things began to clear up a trifle for me. Yes, I saw a way into the obscure events at New Caledonia. The attack by the Vata islanders had been engineered by Kerr, who was responsible for Carnie's death, and the fate of his daughter. Probably it could not be proved, and Brocky Tom was going to settle matters in his own way, backed by Craig. Yet surely a man like Craig, solitary and indifferent, would not speak of the pearls as "all he had to live for!"

The last entry told me what I wanted to know. I won't give it here, for the words from the heart of a stricken man are not to be put before others. I saw what Craig's hope was. And it wasn't the pearls. It was something more precious.

Turning back to the other logs I found in the entries dealing with Craig's visits to New Caledonia more light. No, it wasn't pearls he was after. He had lied to me—or had he? As I recalled our conversation, it was I who said he was after the pearls. Craig had not lied. He had let me believe what I chose to.

Craig loved Helen Carnie. His visits to New Caledonia had been moments of joy and despair. Joy in the sight of the girl, and despair at the shadow that lay on him, keeping him in the South Seas, and depriving him of the right to ask her hand of Carnie. Whether the girl returned his love, I do not know. The entries were silent on this point. Craig was a gentleman.

Yes, he loved Helen Carnie, who had disappeared in the sack of the plantation. And the Vata Lavum islanders had hinted that the girl had been taken off in Kerr's schooner. She had not been heard from since then. Truly, it was a slight hope that led Bernard Craig and his companion to Vata Lavum.

In the hills of the island they might find the girl with Kerr. One of the entries showed that Kerr had come to New Caledonia and had boasted once when drunk that he would take what he wanted from Carnie. Were the pearls a blind, to hide the real purpose of the outlaw skipper—to carry off the girl? Stranger and more wicked things had come to pass in the islands, and Kerr was not a man to forbear what he desired.

Through all the entries ran the unspoken thought of Bernard Craig. The thought that if Helen Carnie had been taken on Kerr's schooner, the girl would be no longer alive, being too proud to endure what Kerr offered. Also the iron determination of the owner of the *Natalie* to find Kerr and demand a reckoning for what had happened at New Caledonia.

Yes, I saw what had brought us to Vata Lavum. And the thing that had taken Craig and Brocky Tom, who had been faithful to Carnie and his daughter, to the hills. Craig had known of certain dangers. He had been warned by white men and islanders of the *tabu* of the interior, of the crawling sickness. Yet, knowing further facts himself about the witch-doctors of the hills, about the white dwarfs, he had gone to the *mlurga* gates after Helen Carnie.

And John Kerr? How had he gone into the hills? I guessed at the answer, and a chill chased itself up my spine. Waritai had said that John Kerr was allied to the witch-doctors.

I thought things over pretty hard that night, and before I turned in, had reached a decision.

Craig and Brocky Tom had been gone more than the week they had planned. Something had gone wrong with them, in the hills. I was the only white man on the *Natalie*, and it would not do to leave the vessel. But I had a hunch that Craig and his partner would not come back from Vata Lavum. No other white man would go after them. If any one went, it had to be me.

I told Waritai what I had decided the next day. I would take the schooner out in the night as far as the Malo Pass, into the rapid current that would drift her down to Mallicollo where there was a trading-station. When the ship reached the current I would leave her in Waritai's hands with a note to the traders, and pull off for Vata Lavum in a small boat.

Waritai broke into shrill protest when he heard this, but I had made up my mind. You see I didn't know what was in store for me in the interior. If I had—well, I came near thinking better of it when I told Waritai to return after a week with the trader to Vata Lavum and wait for us, in the cove, and heard Waritai's comment. He said there would be no use in coming back for us. Craig and McCracken, he knew, were dead and I would soon join them.

I got him to promise, though, that he would see that the schooner came back for us.

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VIII

IT WASN'T without misgivings that I landed on Vata Lavum Island that night and drew up the boat that had brought me into the weeds of a mangrove swamp. Vata Lavum was some nine miles square, and what lay beyond the hills I did not know. The hills began a ways back from the shore, and rose in verdant mounds to a considerable height—three or four thousand feet.

The moon was a little bigger by now, so I could see where I was going, after a fashion. I wanted to get into the brush, away from Thola's people. I had a compass and one of the Spencers from the schooner, with a good supply of cartridges. In a light pack I carried enough yams, bread and dried meat to last for three days. But the island offered plenty to eat—fruit, coconuts, pineapples, and occasional pigeons.

Bearing away from the shore, I headed up a promising looking valley, making fair progress in spite of the lush verdure and the continual vines. The moon kept me company, although the trees were so thick overhead it didn't do much good.

Of course I had no idea where Craig and McCracken were. They had gone into the interior after Kerr, and there I might find them. After leaving the shore, I had no fear of running into Thola's men, for the latter kept to the beaches, and held the interior in hearty respect. My purpose was to get to the summits of some of the mountains and take an observation of the land.

One thing puzzled me. Both Craig and Waritai had mentioned hillmen, yet there was nothing to show the latter ever made their appearance. Certainly we had not seen them along the beaches. Where did their village lie? I wanted to locate it if possible, before I got a poisoned arrow stuck in my back.

Then there were the *mlurga* gates. Craig had not described them. They must be the entrances to the hill village, where Kerr had his hangout. But what were they like? How would I know them?

Well, I had a number of questions in the back of my brain when I went into the hills of Vata Lavum that first night. After another day and night of beating through the ever-present brush, I had another—a mighty big one.

In those two nights and one day I had covered a good part of the interior. I was dizzy with the heat and the damp miasma of the forest, bewildered by the colored birds and the clinging vines, and torn with thorns. But I had sighted neither hillmen nor village. I had seen no sign of Craig and Brocky Tom.

I was beginning to think the hill people were a myth, and the *mlurga* gates my companions had sought were likewise. More, I was half-convinced Craig and McCracken had never come here, so void of human life was the forest.

Had the entries in the log-book been lies? Had Waritai's tales been inspired by nothing more than superstition? Did Craig and McCracken really go after pearls? Perhaps they were even now laughing with Kerr over some shore fire and waiting for the schooner.

By the beginning of the third day I was thoroughly sick. The fever had taken a grip on my pulse, and my food supply was low. I seemed to have been tramping through vines and lush for weeks, and it was with an effort I remembered the whole time had been only two days.

The mountain summits, however, had proved inaccessible. It was on the morning of the third day that I decided to have one try at the summits, and call it quits if I found nothing. The forest was beginning to get on my nerves and I had brought no quinine to fight the fever.

I picked out one of the lower summits and headed up it, fighting through the tangle of creepers, cutting the way at times with my knife. The way seemed to get more difficult as I advanced.

It was when I had stopped to rest, sitting on some vines, that I saw the first trace of human beings in the hills of Vata Lavum. It was an arrow, stuck in a tree trunk, a few feet over my head. The arrow had been imbedded for some time, and I drew it out with difficulty.

It was fashioned of a strong reed, with a three-inch tip of human bone, the point glazed in a curious manner. I handled that point gingerly, being wary of poisons. The arrow was not the kind used by Thola and his men. But of the man who shot the arrow and his tribe there was no sign.

Throwing the thing aside, I pressed on up the slope. For the first time something like fear gripped me. As I listened I seemed to hear the patter of naked feet over the undergrowth. Cockatoos swung into flight

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in the trees ahead of me as if alarmed at the approach of something else. It was only a brief obsession, but when I mastered it I found that the fever had mounted higher in my veins.

The gorgeous green and yellow and purple of the foliage appeared brighter, and the sun burned my face. Then I came out into what I thought was a cleared space and halted.

It was lucky I did so, for the space in front of me proved to be a precipice. At least it was a circular cavity, some hundred yards across, that sank away under my feet. For a distance down the sides I could see creepers and hibiscus flowers; then a black gulf. The slope down was abrupt, so I could not see far below me. I stood there wondering what it was, and how I was going to get around it, when I heard a rustling in the undergrowth.

I swung around, lifting my rifle, for it was an ugly place to be caught, even by a wild pig. The slow rustling continued, and the cockatoos overhead were in wild flight. I could even see some of the creepers move, but nothing living was visible.

It was a bad moment, and I was half afraid the fever was tricking me, when I caught the rustling closer at hand. This time I located it, not in the brush, but in the trees overhead. I looked up hastily.

I ducked as quickly. I had just been in time to glimpse two dark forms dropping toward me from the branches a few feet over my head. Then something heavy landed on my shoulder, knocking me to the earth, at the edge of the ravine, and sending the rifle smashing from my hands.

A second body struck me, and I caught sight of a dark, grinning face thrust close to me. I reached for the face, when hands caught me, and hauled me toward the edge. In a second I was smashing downward through the vines.

Clutching at the creepers, I checked my course for a second, only to feel the hands tugging at me again. My two foes were coming with me down the precipice. This time there was no stopping. The vines tore away as we rolled down, and presently we fell clear. I felt myself drop through space helplessly, blood singing in my ears.

Then came a roaring crash. The blood seemed to burst all over me, and I sank into something warm and clinging.

IX

I HAD fallen into water and the next moment I was swimming through a pool which flickered in my face from sunlight. But I couldn't see anything ahead of me. I felt a push on my shoulder, and saw another head moving alongside me.

It was a dark head, with straight black hair, different from the fuzzy mops of the islanders. The face, too, was different, being yellow instead of a burned brown. The eyes were very large. The swimmer's arm as it flashed up from the water wasn't black but olive. He seemed to be heading me in a certain direction.

My wits were still wandering a bit, and I kept on beside my two companions who were splendid swimmers. They moved through the water as if they belonged there, without effort. Once I turned over on my back and looked up. Then I got an idea how we had descended into the water. Some distance overhead the mouth of the crater showed. I saw the sides, green with vines. On two sides the vine sloped fell to the water. On the others a black tunnel loomed. Into this we were swimming.

I followed obediently after the two swimmers, believing that they had reason to seek safety. They made no effort to attack me in the water. Somehow I felt that they knew where they were headed, strange as it seemed.

Who were they? How had they come to fall with me into these waters? I did not try to answer these questions then, being content to keep my head above the water, which was warm and comfortable. We left the ring of sunlight behind us and swam forward into a twilight. The reflection of the surface behind us showed me that we were in a kind of channel, bordered on both sides by weeds of some kind, and further on by what seemed to be trees. Oh, it was a weird course we shaped in the murk of the waters, the two men and I, into the depths of the white forests.

There was nothing to do but follow them. One glance had shown me that it was impossible to climb out where we had fallen in, and I saw land, or what resembled it, ahead.

A few moments more and we had lost sight of the sun behind us, having turned several times in the channel. The light here

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was faint, seeming to come from a species of rushes which lined the water. It came, however, from the ground behind the weeds. Presently my feet touched bottom and I stood up. My companions swam a space further, then rose to their feet. Even in the murk of the place, I could see they came only to my shoulder.

Taking me by the arm, one of them struck forward into a path through the rushes. The other followed behind. I was too weak to do anything but hold myself up. I thought they knew where they were going. We went through the rushes, almost in darkness. Yet the others went without hesitation. It seemed as if they could see where they were going. Later, I found that they could.

We came out into a cleared space. The blackness overhead showed me we were still underground, but I stopped short at what I saw. In front of me, blazing with light was a house. yes, an ordinary house, built of bamboo, with window-panes and curtains in the windows. We were standing in the open space in front of the house. The place was long and narrow, being of one story. One of my companions stepped up to the porch that ran along its length, and I heard a bell jingle somewhere in the interior. A Chinese servant came to the door and opened it for us.

So it was that I, Walter Bailey, came through the *mlurga* gates, through the white forest to the House of Hidden Faces.

X

MIND you, this house was underground. Overhead was the rocky wall of the mountain. The soil it was built on was dark loam, filled with fungoid growths and very moist. The heat of the place was great, although tempered by the waters. At the time I thought the house was at the end of a subterranean gallery, running off from the pool into which I had fallen. Later, I came to understand more of the strange country that lay under the *mlurga* gate—of the many other gates and the subterranean lakes lined with pale weeds, resembling the ghosts of flowers, that formed the land of the *tulaitu*. I had guessed even then that the *tulaitu* folk were the hidden hillmen of Vata Lavum.

For the moment the house engaged my attention. My companion brought me into a long room. I saw that they were light-skinned natives, very short and thickset, wearing only a loin cloth and without weapons. The light seemed to distress them. And the light came from electric bulbs set around the room.

The place was furnished much as I had seen traders' houses, only better, with bamboo and wicker work, and an occasional teakwood chair. The walls were bamboo, fitted with sandal wood. Books and magazines were on the shelves and a phonograph stood in one corner.

One of my companions who had left the room for a moment returned and signified that I was to wait where I was. The two went out, then, leaving me alone. I dropped into a chair and fell to observing the room, my clothes drying rapidly from the heat.

It did not occur to me to leave the house. Where was I to go? Rather, I was curious to see the owner. And this I did presently.

I looked up, at a sound behind me, and saw that a tall white man was watching me from one of the entrances.

He was fully as tall as Brocky Tom, with stooped shoulders, and a narrow, bearded face. His face, which was sunburned, was that of a man in the prime of life, perhaps forty, with very dark eyes, set close together, and a massive brow. The jutting brow, over a hooked nose gave him a grim look which wasn't helped by the black, close-set eyes and swarthy skin. My first sight of him gave me the impression of the physical power of the man. Beside him Craig and I, although sizable men, looked weak.

"And who may you be?" he asked, in a very high voice.

I got to my feet facing him, feeling that my wet clothes gave me a sheepish air. He was well dressed in a dark, loose suit.

"My name," I said, "is Walter Bailey, of the schooner *Natalie*."

"You know Craig then," he snapped quickly. His big hands twisted nervously and his gaze searched me from head to foot. "How did you happen to come to my house? You weren't invited."

"I fell in," I smiled, "through no fault of mine. A couple of yellow natives seemed anxious to bring me here, from the forest outside. I happened to be looking for Craig."

My companion nodded as if he had known as much. His glance left me. The

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frown in his brow smoothed, as if he had made up his mind on a vexed point.

"And who may you be?" I asked, for I did not like his manner.

"Why do you ask what you already know, Bailey?" he retorted. I noticed then that his speech was that of an educated man, although domineering. "Is there any one in the South Seas that doesn't know John Kerr?"

I was silent at that. Here was the man Craig and Brocky Tom had been seeking. The man who was rated as dead in the South Seas. And at his house I might sooner or later find them. Were they already there? I did not know. Perhaps. I waited for Kerr's next move, studying the man.

"Dinner is waiting in the next room, Bailey. If you care to eat with John Kerr. I think, after your trip through the *mlurga* gate, food will be welcome."

As a matter of fact, I was acutely hungry. Moreover, I felt that it would be bad policy to refuse. So I sat down with John Kerr, to a daintily appointed table, and was served with a well-cooked dinner of turtle soup, fowl, some very good fish, yams and fruit, topped off with sherry of excellent flavor.

The steward who served us was a Chinaman, quiet and efficient. Kerr was silent for the most part, studying me when I was not watching him. Although he appeared courteous, I was not at ease. The heat of the place oppressed me. And I felt that I was being watched, not only by Kerr but by others.

"I am glad to have a guest, Bailey," he said in conclusion. "The usual run of white men aren't welcome in this house. I think that you and I may get along together. I hope so. My wife does not come down to meals often. Later, I will introduce you."

Was there veiled sarcasm in this speech? I had looked up quickly at the mention of his wife, and found his keen eyes on me, with a blank stare. Did he refer to Helen Carnie? If he expected me to question him, he was disappointed. The man spoke arrogantly, with pride. He had mentioned his wife because he thought I would be startled. In the same spirit he asked me to go with him to see his plantation.

"We have not much to offer a guest here, Bailey," he said, smiling, "but there is quite a little scenery. Yes, some scenery. You had better come."

I had no idea of refusing. I was as anxious as he to have a look around. He gave an order to the Chinaman, and when we stepped out on the porch he pointed to a dark shadow that lay against the edge of the space before the house, visible in the light from the windows.

"My private canoe," he said grimly. "By the way, Bailey—I can see you are curious—these lights are fed by a dynamo. If you listen you can hear it in one of the out-houses. There are other conveniences, hot and cold water, both fresh and salt. My grocery system is pretty good, isn't it? Well, the fish and yams are grown here. The yams grow under the crater mouths, on a few patches of ground. Other things are—imported."

We entered the large canoe that was drawn up at a jetty. I noticed that two Chinamen were in it, with paddles. I found out later that John Kerr hadn't any of the *tulaitu* folk for his house servants.

The canoe started off at a word from Kerr who seated himself in front of and facing me. We went for a ways through the canal whence I had come, only in another direction. And I got a glimpse of the strange world that lay under the hills of Vata Lavum, the *malemba* lakes, as Kerr called it. I was silent, being taken aback by what I saw.

For as we went we passed luminous forms that swam by us under the water. We paddled down canals that opened into wide lakes. Always the shores were lined with the pale lush reeds, a stunted fungus growth, pure white in color. Often we passed under openings in the rock overhead, where we could see the blue sky. Where there was no light from overhead the ground behind the fungus gave out a soft glow akin to phosphorus. The soil was covered with a network of glowing filaments.

"Yes," said John Kerr who seemed well content with himself, "the white color of the weeds is due to the darkness. The *tulaitus* call them 'flowers of death' for they are without perfume or colors. Where there never has been light, all foliage is white. The weeds and the fungi filaments that cover the ground beyond are called the white forest. The fungi are *phanerogamen*. They help to light the place.

"The luminous forms in the water are fish, covered with bacteria that shine in the darkness. The scientists at Brisbane

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call it *bacterium phosphoreum*. Dead things become luminous under certain conditions. There are a lot of dead things here."

I dipped my hand over the side and tasted some drops of the water. It was fresh, but bitter, being sulfurous in taste.

"I suppose that's why the natives here are light in color," I hazarded, being genuinely curious. "Are there many of these—fellows—who live underground?"

"Enough," said John Kerr shortly.

He began to explain, however, something of the nature of the *malemba* lakes. More than he said, I guessed at.

The giant passages we were threading were volcanic chasms, the craters being the openings over the lakes. These craters were, of course, extinct. The coming of the fresh water from springs in the mountain hearts, had generated a species of fungus vegetation, thriving on the heat and the water. The soil was a lava formation enriched from decayed vegetation. The fungi of the white forest were a network of luminous filaments, their roots underground.

We must have gone for half a dozen miles, turning and twisting, however, so it was hard to guess the real size of the *malemba* waters and the subterranean fields. I calculated later that the waters stretched for three miles or so under the Vata Lavum hills. Everywhere we met the shining fish, often trailing their phosphorescent parasites yards behind them.

Occasionally we met with other canoes, bearing *tulaitu* men and women who passed us with a curious stare. They were the same squat, yellow men that had jumped with me into the crater. Once or twice we passed their village, groups of houses made of thatched reeds and bamboo, with tracts of what seemed to be yams and a species of mushrooms, on strips of ground where the sunlight reached.

In the bright light under one of the crater mouths a canoe larger than ordinary passed us. The paddlers in this craft wore curious masks made to resemble beasts, dogs and the like. The weird aspect of the canoe was increased by a carved image of an owl at its prow.

Some men in more elaborate masks sat in the stern. I saw that they were taller than the others, and that the masks they wore were semblances of human beings, grinning and tortured. They were painted somewhat in the fashion of the Santa Cruz islanders, whose doctor-men wore masks.

Indeed, this was my first sight of the doctor-men of the *malemba* lakes. They stared at us, their masks sinister-looking because of boar tusks and the rolling eyes which gleamed from the holes. I noticed that these men wore robes fashioned of fiber and that they kept to the lighted waters, where the *tulaitus* did not go much, the glare hurting their sensitive eyes. They raised their hands in greeting to us.

All the while I kept a weather eye out for a place where the craters could be climbed. But the sides were always either sheer or overhanging, so that ascent was impossible.

XI

"AND now," said John Kerr to me when we were again in the living-room of his house, "you can tell me some of the news from—outside. For instance, had the news of the wreck of the *Annie* got to Queensland?"

His dark eyes narrowed as he watched me, and again I felt the dominant power of the man.

"At Maryborough," I told him, "the harbor master told Craig that the *Annie* had been wrecked off Vata Lavum. They thought you were killed in the wreck, or by the islanders."

"Ah, that is interesting. So they thought I was as dead—as St. George Carnie. He was killed by his boys. Carnie was hard on them; too hard. I was off the plantation when it happened. But I suppose that's an old story—eh?"

I nodded. It was easy to see Kerr was fishing around to get me to tell what was known of the affair at New Caledonia. Naturally, I didn't say much. He wasn't quite satisfied with this, however.

"They say some of the Vata Lavum boys were in the mob that did for old Carnie. I suppose some of these navy know-it-alls have strung up the poor boys? Eh, Bailey?"

"I guess so," I answered truthfully. "Brocky Tom accused them of the murder."

His great fists suddenly clenched, and his eyes bored into me.

"Don't lie to me, Bailey. It won't do. I warn you. Tell me the truth and I'll be easy with you. If the Queensland people thought I was dead, how did Bernard Craig come after me here, straight from Maryborough?"

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"As to that, he told me nothing, Kerr," I growled back at him. "I shipped as supercargo on the *Natalie*. Craig told me that he had come after pearls. If he knew you were alive, he didn't publish the fact."

Kerr debated this and his brow cleared a little. Plainly he was pleased at the thought that he was listed as dead in the South Seas.

"How did you come to follow Craig, Bailey?"

"When he didn't return to the schooner, I went to see where he was," I told him, truthfully. "I knew he'd gone to the hills of Vata Lavum after some pearls."

"So you believed he'd find pearls in the hills," Kerr's white teeth showed through his black mustache in a grin. "Well, the pearls he wanted were burned up in Carnie's house after I sold 'em to him. Craig, the God-fearing skipper, turned thief, eh? And you think the *Natalie's* coming back for you, Bailey? Another mistake. The *Natalie* will not come back. Thola told my men it wouldn't. Thola is a great liar, but he sent the head of Craig's boatman, Waritai, as proof. Yes, I don't think Thola lied. The Queensland numskulls will write the schooner off as another wreck in the Malo Pass. Maybe they'll write you and Craig and Brocky Tom off as drowned. That will help matters."

With that he left me to my own thoughts. They weren't pleasant. Here was Kerr, master of the House of Hidden Faces. A power of some kind in the *malemba* lakes. I had found the man Craig was looking for.

Well, I sat down and coaxed a pipeful of damp tobacco to light. One of the Chinamen presently appeared and said in pidgin-English that Kerr had given over one of the bedrooms to me. I followed the boy back into the house. In doing so I got an idea of the lay of the house. The big room, Kerr's den—I could see him sitting in it—and the dining-room occupied the front.

Two bedrooms, the doors of both being open, and what must be the kitchen composed the back of it. The Chinaman showed me into one and bowed himself out impassively. It was a white room, with a cot and a bureau that must have come from Queensland.

But what puzzled me was this. I had looked into every room in the house. I had been in it some hours. Yet I had seen nothing of the woman who was Kerr's wife. The master of the house had said, curiously, that she did not come "down" to meals often. There was, however, no upper story. Where did Kerr keep his wife?

I dismissed this to ponder more serious things over my pipe. Kerr had quizzed me shrewdly. He might or might not believe my replies. I had learned from him that he knew Craig and Brocky Tom had come after him. Where were they? I had a gloomy hunch that they had managed to get into the *mlurga* gates, and were now somewhere in the murky regions of the *malemba* lakes.

Had Kerr told the truth about the schooner? It was fully possible that Thola and his men had seen the vessel pull out into the strait, and had followed her in canoes, overpowering the few boatmen, and sinking the *Natalie* after looting her. If this was so, the remains of Waritai, my note to the Mallicollo trader, and Craig's diary were all somewhere in the bottom of the Malo Pass. With the schooner every shred of evidence against Kerr had vanished. Also every trace of Craig, McCracken and myself.

I felt a twinge of fear as I realized the devilish cunning of the master of the house I was in. It was my first meeting with the man who was known in the South Seas as John Kerr, and already I felt the black power of the man. The heat of the place was making me drowsy, and presently, fully dressed, I lay down on the cot. Sleep came quickly. I thought, as I dozed off, that John Kerr came to the door and peered in at me.

Several hours must have passed before I wakened. My watch had stopped with the fall into the crater and I had no means of knowing the time. The lights were still blazing, however, and I got up feeling little the better for my sleep, on account of the heat. I thought I heard John Kerr in the living-room and made my way there, for I preferred the society of the man to the lonely room.

Kerr was slouched in a chair by the table, a decanter of sherry at his elbow. His face was flushed from drinking and the heat, but his dark eyes were alert. He heard me immediately and swung around, watchfully, one hand going into his coat. Seeing me he smiled broadly and motioned me to a chair beside him. He was pouring out another glass of sherry which was a welcome sight to me in my present condition

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when his eye fell on my wrinkled and damp clothing.

"Better change those rags, Bailey," he said curtly, "if you want to escape the fever of this place. There are some slops in your room. Here man, take a drink or two. You look as if you needed one."

I gulped down the drinks he offered, and with a muttered word of thanks turned back to my room. I felt his mocking glance on me as I did so. When I reached the door he clapped his hands suddenly.

"I'll have the Chinks send a man to valet you, Bailey," he cried. "When you're decent, we can pay a call on my wife."

I went out without replying. Oh, I cut a sorry figure beside John Kerr then. That night I began to hate the man, as any one did who came to know him. Yet they say there are some women who can love a man of that type. Hatred, after all, is not far from love.

I found a clean suit of duck in a drawer of the bureau and I had thrown off my soiled and torn clothes when I heard a step in the door. Remembering that Kerr had said one of the servants would come, I looked around. Brocky Tom McCracken stood in the door.

Yes, it was Brocky Tom, stripped to his hairy waist, barefooted. He was chained with a ship's irons, used to bind unruly blacks, wrists manacled and bound to his feet which were also chained so he couldn't stand erect. His eyes were heavy and I thought then what Kerr had said of the fever. Only it was no fever that deadened them. For just an instant he straightened as he saw me. Then I noticed that his knotted chest and arms were scarred as if from a fight.

"Tom!" I cried. "So you're here, too. Where is Craig?"

"Kerr sent me to dress ye, Mr. Bailey," he said grimly. "But I reckon ye can do it better yourself. Mr. Craig is in one of the out-houses."

Tom was sullen, and apparently heavy with fever. I questioned him, feeling the glow of the wine as I dressed, and learned something of how he and Craig had come to the *malemba* lakes. There was little to tell, however. The two had lowered themselves into one of the crater mouths by a cord they had brought for that purpose ten days ago, and into the warm water of the subterranean lakes. They had been seen, however, and a canoe had surprised them swimming in the water.

I wondered if John Kerr who seemed to know all that passed on Vata Lavum, had heard of the coming of the white men and prepared for them. It seemed so. At any rate, the two were prisoners and helpless. Craig, Brocky Tom told me, was kept in a shed apart from him.

The house we were in, Tom explained gruffly, was Kerr's retreat. He had built it long ago and furnished it gradually, from the cargo of the schooner. Being in the *tabu* region of Vata Lavum, it was safe from invasion by other white men, and as for Thola's people, they dreaded the sight of a *tulailu*, owing to the crawling sickness, whatever that was. Tom admitted that he and Craig had known that Kerr had an alliance of some sort with the doctor-men, who were all-powerful in the *malemba* lakes.

Well, the overseer's tale put an end to the hope that he and Craig were at liberty. I had suspected that they were prisoners, since I first met Kerr. The man was changed, subtly, dulled as if by fever. His heavy hands moved slowly and he paused in his speech like a man who has to collect his thoughts. Only once did he show a flash of his old masterfulness.

"Kerr is taking me," I had told him, "to see his wife. Is she Helen Carnie?"

" 'Tis a lie!" snarled Brocky Tom, his hands clenching. "Helen Carnie would have died by her own hand on the schooner, aye, before she became the property of John Kerr. Ye will not find her here and living."

"But she is here," the high voice of Kerr cut in from the door, "and Bailey will see her. Helen Carnie came here as my wife, and she is well content."

I wondered if he had heard my question, for I had said nothing of Helen Carnie to him. He must have passed it over, I thought, at the time. But John Kerr did not lightly pass over such things. He had heard me speak the girl's name first, and had branded me as a liar in what I said to him regarding the girl and her father.

XII

TRULY, I had not expected to find Helen Carnie as I did find her. There were many strange things in the *malemba* lakes, where men lived apart from the sun, but none so strange as the

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golden-haired daughter of St. George Carnie, who had died because of John Kerr.

This time the canoe took us to another part of the lakes, lying, so far as I could guess, nearly opposite John Kerr's house. We passed more of the reed villages of the *tulaitus*, and soon I heard a sound of many voices over the dark waters in a chant. The chant grew louder and our craft drew up at a stone jetty, fashioned out of sheer rock. Steps carved in the stone led up to a level space that was lighted by a glow on the further side.

The singing came from the place where the glow was and Kerr and I made our way toward it. I looked at my companion, and saw that his face was set, as if he was about to go through an ordeal. Perhaps these visits to the hall of the doctor-men were ordeals for Kerr.

We advanced under a stone arch into a circular chamber in the rock, its floor patterned in different colored sandstone, and halted. From seats by the wall of the chamber tall figures arose and faced us.

My pulse leaped up a notch or two at the sight. The figures all bore the masks I had seen in the canoe, grinning and ferocious in the red glare of the fire that burned in the center of the circular chamber.

Kerr lifted his hand ceremoniously in greeting and one of the strange figures with a gilded mask and a long robe did likewise. They spoke together for a moment, when the other turned and vanished through an arch that led into some interior recess. Presently the man of the gilt mask emerged. Kerr beckoned me impatiently. I saw that we were allowed to go into the interior chamber.

With a backward glance at the masked figures which watched us steadily from wooden faces, I followed Kerr, stooping a little to enter the chamber. I found myself in a smaller room, walled in rock, the sides of which were ornamented by tall effigies much like the totem gods of the Mallicollo islanders. The curtain of fiber and silk which had covered the entrance dropped into place behind us.

But it was not the effigies that caught my eye. Lanterns, bearing a kind of wax candles—as I found by examination—lighted the space, and showed me a woman asleep on a couch placed against the wall. A slender girl, her eyes closed and the silken breast of her robe rising and falling with her breathing, and her golden hair, finer than the silk, hanging about her shoulders and her white throat.

Her face was turned toward us, and I saw that is was delicate, as if worn thin by suffering or some other cause. The hands which touched her robe were thin, so that the blue veins showed. There were shadows under the closed eyes. She was dressed in a single robe of white silk, with a broad girdle the color of her hair. Her feet were bare. She seemed young, not yet twenty.

Kerr stepped to the side of the couch and looked down at her. His arms were crossed over his chest, and he frowned. The black look left his eyes, being replaced by a gleam, a soft glow that answered the flickering fires of the lanterns.

I watched the two without stirring. My brain was still warm with the wine, and I wondered greatly. Here was a girl the like of whom I had not seen in the South Seas. I had no doubt, from the description of her that had crept into Craig's log book, that it was Helen Carnie, the woman who, Kerr said, was his wife.

Perhaps some sound we made disturbed her. Or Kerr's silent scrutiny may have found its way into her senses; but the dark eyelids fluttered. A pair of gray, clear eyes looked up at Kerr. I had expected her to be alarmed at our coming. Instead her eyes remained blank. She looked from Kerr to me and back again, with a curious questioning glance. Curling her bare feet under her she sat up. Her hands strayed up to the golden mass of hair and she stroked it idly, paying no further attention to us.

Truly, Helen Carnie was beautiful. The fantastic light of the lanterns played on her hair, which fell clear to the couch, until it shimmered like a river of silk. Her gray eyes looked out under long lashes and a faint smile played about red lips that seemed to laugh wistfully. Yes, she was a woman to set mad the hearts of men like Craig and Kerr. And stalwart McCracken.

Kerr had turned to me with a curious expression.

"Did I lie to you, Bailey?" he said grimly. "This is my wife. I brought her here in my schooner. She doesn't remember that, though."

A sudden thought flashed on me. Why didn't she remember? Surely the girl's blank gaze was not the look of a woman in possession of all her senses. She leaned

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forward as if listening to the distant singing in the outer corridors, humming a low accompaniment to it. Kerr was watching her hungrily, but she did not heed his gaze. Truly John Kerr kept his wife in a strange place.

He stepped nearer to her, and laid his hand on her shoulder. She looked up with the frank interest of a child.

"Helen," he said softly, "you would like to return to my house. This is no place for you. There is a better one at the house. You know that I will take care of you."

She frowned, as if wondering at this, and shook her head.

"I am happy here," she said, as if that ended it, and Kerr sighed.

"Helen—" he said again and stopped.

"Who is the man," said a strained voice in broken English behind us," that touches the Golden Queen of Malemba?"

Turning hastily I saw the figure of the masked man in gilt. He had pulled aside the curtain and was watching Kerr from the wooden mask. Gilt boar's tusks curled up beside his eyes from the opening of the mouth. I wondered at the man speaking English. I came to know, however, that Kerr had taught him the language. Kerr knew the lingo of the doctor-men.

I saw Kerr snarl, and his hand strayed to his coat. The hand on the girl's shoulder dropped to his side, however.

"When her spirit strays in the shades of Lelemis," continued the deep voice of the masked man, "it is not well for a man to touch her."

Kerr's glance met that of the witch-doctor without fear.

"Aye, Cha Tara," he said, "but I shall answer for what I do. No one else."

"Has not the Golden Queen answered for herself?"

Kerr shrugged his shoulders ironically. The girl held out a shapely arm to the hideous gilt figure, and Cha Tara dropped to his knees, bowing the high mask that covered his head.

"The Golden Queen will be alone with her servant," he said reverently, "and her guests can not stay."

Kerr hesitated. Then with an oath he swung to the door. I lost no time in following him. A backward glance showed me that Cha Tara, he of the gilt mask, was facing Helen Carnie on his knees, both arms lifted. The girl was watching him impassively.

Well, I didn't get to breathing naturally until we were in the house again. Kerr said nothing more to me about his wife, and I did not question him. How had the girl brought to Malemba been placed in the sanctuary of the gods? Why did Kerr, who certainly was not lacking in daring, allow his wife, as he had called her, to be taken from him? He had brought me to see her out of his strange pride. To prove that the girl was in the *malemba* lakes.

It was too much for me, and I gave it up. One thing was certain, however, and that was, Kerr respected the witch-doctors. Also that the witch-doctors had taken the girl from him.

At our coming Brocky Tom who was curled up asleep on the floor roused himself and stared at us stupidly. He did not linger in the room, but retreated to the rear, dragging his feet clumsily. He looked to me as if he was mighty sick. Something in the way he carried his bulk bespoke weakness, whether of fever or otherwise.

I turned in, on my cot, switching off the lights, for I was dead tired. The thought of the girl would not leave me. Helen Carnie, I thought, was mad. And her madness made her sacred in the eyes of the witch-doctors. I had heard of *loco* among the islanders, and the reverence paid to insanity. Well, it was a guess, but it came pretty near the mark.

XIII

YOU would think John Kerr would have been afraid to let me wander around loose. He didn't take any chances, however, for there was always one of the Chinks watching me from some corner of the house. The next day, if it could be called that without any sunrise, Kerr was absent from the place and I started to make the rounds of it, being curious, and keen to get the lay of the land.

The House of Hidden Faces was bordered on two sides by water. The fungoid growth that was the white forest occupied another side. For quite a ways in the rear, however, there was a clear path, beside which a sizable stream ran. This stream came from a waterfall which seemed to give Kerr his power for working the dynamo.

Beside the waterfall was the power-house

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and dynamo. Against this an out-building was erected and here I found Craig. The place was built of stout bamboos, and the window was only some six inches square. I heard my name called as I went by it, and saw Craig's pale face looking from the window, in the murk of the place.

For some reason he was kept confined while Brocky Tom had the run of the place such as it was. He had been there a week with an owl for companion. The owl, was a pet of Kerr's. I saw many of the birds eventually, flying through the darkness of Malemba. I guess it suited them.

Craig was naturally eager to know how I'd got here, and we compared notes to some advantage. I kept back much of what I'd seen at the witch-doctors' hall, especially about the condition of the girl. I said Cha Tara had her as a kind of sacred person, which was about the truth. Craig admitted Kerr had told him the girl was his wife and alive and well. He questioned me a lot about her, how she looked and how the witch-doctors treated her.

Craig appeared to know a good deal about the *tulaitus*. Said there had been stories about a tribe of yellow dwarfs in the hills. They let Kerr alone, he said, because they were afraid of him, but mostly because they knew he was a friend of the doctor-men. The latter were very powerful, and Craig believed they went outside, to the coast of Vata Lavum, and the near-by islands of Ambrym and Mallicollo. That explained why the doctor-men did not shun the sunlight, and why they were taller than the *tulaitus* who never left the place; also, it seems to me, why Vata Lavum, Ambrym and Mallicollo were centers of the sorcery of the South Seas. At any rate, the New Hebrides islanders are the only ones that wear masks.

"How did you get here, Bailey?" he ended up.

I told him how we had waited for him and McCracken in the schooner. Also the fate of the *Natalie* as Kerr had repeated it to me. He stretched out his hand through the window and I caught it.

"That was good of you, Bailey," he said with feeling. "You couldn't get many white men to do the same. Vata Lavum has a reputation. How is Tom treated?"

Well, I won't soon forget the look of horror, plain horror that came into Bernard Craig's face when I told him about Brocky Tom's sickness. The hand that held mine tightened, and I could have sworn I saw moisture on his brow that wasn't from heat.

"Fever?" he repeated, as if dazed. "No, there is no fever with symptoms like that. Good Lord, Bailey, and we haven't been here ten days!"

I recalled the sleepy eyes of the giant overseer and the slow movements of his limbs, and I felt a touch of the fear that shone in Craig's face. If it wasn't fever that had struck Brocky Tom, what was it? I didn't know then, being new to the *malemba* lakes.

"So Tom is sick," went on Craig, as if talking to himself. "Bailey, keep clear of the doctor-men. Don't let them touch you, or Kerr, either. If they try to, make a break for it, or something."

"What's the matter with Brocky Tom?" I asked in a whisper, for I felt that we were watched.

Craig shook his head thoughtfully.

"I know something about this place, Bailey, from Waritai and others. The witch-doctors have a certain wisdom, a beastly kind of wisdom. You have seen the men who paddle the canoes and lurk around the hall of the doctor-men? The ones that wear masks of animals? The doctor-men wear human masks. Well, the others are sick. And it isn't fever. I don't know—it's hard to believe——"

He broke off, listening. Some of the Chinks were moving around the out-houses.

"And you say Cha Tara calls Helen Carnie the Golden Queen, Bailey? Kerr knew the legend of the island when he brought her here. The legend runs that the island was once a mountain of fire. That was the volcanoes, of course, before they became extinct. Well, the doctor-men have the story that a Golden Queen was born in the fire with hair the color of the flames and with a white skin. This queen lived with her body in the mountain, but her spirit in the other world they call Lelemis. When the flames died away, they say the Golden Queen went down into the mountain. As long as smoke kept coming up from the craters the islanders say they caught sight at times of the Golden Queen.

"The legend resembles some of the Chinese myths, and I suspect the first of the doctor-men were Chinese. It's pretty certain they haven't seen any white women on Vata Lavum, and they took Helen

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Carnie for the Golden Queen returning to her kingdom. Maybe Kerr threw out the tale to scare them off her; but it had the other effect. Bailey, Helen Carnie is all-powerful in the *malemba* lakes. If the doctor-men don't suspect her, she can make them do what she wants. She can get us and herself out of here.

"Bailey," said Bernard Craig softly, "you've got to get loose from the house. Go to the hall of the doctor-men and tell Helen Carnie our story. It's our one chance. Either that or the sickness that's taken Brocky Tom. Kerr has given you a free hand. He may want to use you himself later. Get out of here, and go to the hall of the doctor-men."

The Chinamen were coming toward us then, and he stopped. I nodded to show I had understood. I didn't have the heart to tell him the truth. That Helen Carnie had been crazed by the massacre at New Caledonia, and didn't know us from the *tulaitus*. That the reason Cha Tara and his fellows had taken her for the Golden Queen was that her mind was a blank. Wandering, as they believed, in Lelemis. God knows!

The man loved Helen Carnie. He risked his life and ours to get to her. How could I tell him the truth?

But what he said about her power stuck in my brain. It was a slender hope. Perhaps mad Helen Carnie could help us. Or I could bring back a glimmer of reason to her darkened brain. I didn't see how that could be, but it comforted me to think of it.

I was given no chance to leave the House of Hidden Faces. Kerr kept me with him when he was at home, questioning me about the "outside" and taking grim satisfaction in the fact that men thought him dead. He drank much. I think Helen Carnie's position preyed on his mind. He was a man who liked little to be balked.

Brocky Tom grew more silent as the days went on. It got so I did not speak to him of what I intended to do. His heavy face grew lined, and he slept much. I noticed that the Chinamen avoided him. Kerr would bring Tom to his room and mock him. But the overseer made no reply. His spirit seemed to have been broken.

When Kerr left the place the Chinamen watched me. I spoke occasionally with Craig. We had become accustomed to the heat of the place. But Tom seemed to be sickening.

I had lost track of time, but it must have been a full week after I fell through the *mlurga* gate that fear first came to me in the night. Fear of the sickness of Brocky Tom.

The lights of the House of Hidden Faces had been put out, except in the room where Kerr was reading, a decanter at his side. I had fallen into a brief sleep on my cot. It was very hot, for no rainfall had cooled the *malemba* lakes for many days and I had sat up on the cot to throw off a blanket.

As I did so I heard a movement beside me in the room. The door had been closed, but in the half-light of the place I could make out a glow that came from Kerr's room. The door had been opened, then, and not by my hand. Quickly I switched on the light.

Beside the bed a few feet away was Brocky Tom. And he was on his hands and knees. His chains, striking together on the floor had made the sound I heard. His heavy eyes were fixed on me, blinking in the light. The sight of the man stirred something in me, something that choked at my throat.

"What's the matter, Tom?" I said softly, for I thought he might have come for a word with me unknown to Kerr.

But the man rose to his feet clumsily and went out of the door without replying. From that night the fear came upon me. Fear of the sickness that gripped Brocky Tom, and the silent men who paddled the canoes and lay in the caverns of the *malemba* lakes, their faces hidden by the masks of beasts.

XIV

ALL that week, and during the days to come, I tried to find means of escaping from the House of Hidden Faces to the hall of the doctor-men. Craig was securely imprisoned, and could aid me only by whispered advice. Through him I learned that there were passages through the rock from one *tulaitu* village to another, where the yellow people could pass without encountering the sunlight they dreaded. This knowledge was to serve me later.

Brocky Tom I felt could not be counted on, because of his sickness. And I remembered his night visit to me with misgivings.

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Yet it was Brocky Tom that brought about the last meeting between me and John Kerr.

It was late one night, for the moonlight was falling into the *malemba* lakes into the pools under the crater mouths. The green glow could be seen from the front of the House of Hidden Faces where I stood. Canoes bearing *tulaitus* with many colored lanterns were passing in the canal which swarmed with the shining fish. The *tulaitus* kept up a low chant as they paddled.

A soft breeze was stirring through the *malemba* lakes, bearing with it the freshness of the outer air. Behind me the white arms of the subterranean forest moved in the breeze. I understand then, in a way, why the people of the *malemba* lakes were happy. Their world was a world of magic, of witchery, and musical with the murmur of waters. Yet the luminous glow of it came from dead things, and the flowers were scentless.

I stood for a long time watching the passing canoes, and when I turned to enter the house, John Kerr who was in the main room, must have forgotten that I was outside. He did not hear me open the door. On the threshold I paused. The lights were all out except for a red reading-lamp on the table. I could see Brocky Tom crouching a short distance away in the shadows. Another thing I noted with surprise. My old suit of clothes that I had missed since changing into the ducks, was over a chair between them.

Kerr was speaking in a low tone to Brocky Tom, and his words halted me. He seemed to be reciting a chant, in English.

"Our paths have divided, O one-with-the mask. Your path is one way; mine is another. When you take the new path you will have another face. You will always wear it, so that men will not look upon your face. Your time has begun, O one-with-the-mask. In the world of shining dead things you will take your place."

He stretched his hand out at Tom, who remained motionless and the fingers of his hand clenched together.

"You have changed, Brocky Tom. A higher will has ordained it. As punishment. You came to the *malemba* lakes seeking blood. Blood you will have. You will slay a man, and tear his flesh apart. You and your comrades. Soon the time will come to slay and eat of what you have killed, O man-with-a-mask."

John Kerr laughed below his breath, and I ground my teeth, for I hated the man. What was this mummery? It was not an attempt at hypnotism. John Kerr did not try to influence Brocky Tom by the strength of his will. He was mocking him, playing with the man who had come to kill him. John Kerr was without fear himself, yet he liked to see it in others.

"Your time has come," he repeated grimly. "Before long you will have tasted blood, and then you will have left the old life. Aye, left it so that there is no return. You are not too far gone to return now. But your will is dead. Come, we will give you your mask."

Still laughing, John Kerr picked up one of the hideous fabrics of wood and painted cloth, adorned with horns which I had seen on the followers of the doctor-men. He reached out quickly and adjusted it on Brocky Tom's head. The overseer made no attempt to prevent him. Aye, it might have been mummery, but I did not like it. All my hatred of the master of the house welled up, and I determined to make an attempt to overpower him. The indignity to Brocky Tom made me hot with anger.

John Kerr had not seen me enter the room, engrossed as he was with the sick man. Nor did he see me advance to the table behind his back. If Brocky Tom saw me through the eye holes of his mask he gave no sign.

A revolver, I knew, was in the inner pocket of Kerr's coat. This was the only weapon he carried, and as far as I could learn the only one in the House of Hidden Faces. This revolver was what I longed for. With it, I might have a chance to win to the hall of the doctor-men, to the Golden Queen.

John Kerr heard me as I sprang from behind the table, and so quick was the man that his weapon flashed out in one hand as I fell with my full weight upon him. The force of my jump carried both of us to the floor. My hands sought his throat, for the revolver had been knocked from his grip by striking on the chair.

I felt the full strength of John Kerr's tall body as he twisted under me, striking me heavily upon the head as he did so.

"The revolver, Tom!" I cried. "Get it—on the floor there, man!"

Brocky Tom did not move, although I saw his eyes fixed on us through the holes

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of the beastly mask. Nor did he move to aid me, though his great muscles even bound with chains would have made short work of John Kerr, in spite of the latter's strength. I heard John Kerr laugh in his beard, and his hands groped for my eyes. Avoiding them, I tightened my grip on the man's throat, panting with the effort I made to hold him.

It might have been that I would have overcome Kerr without aid from Brocky Tom, but at that moment I heard the patter of feet in the passageway, and looking up, saw the Chinamen coming to his assistance. My cry had startled them.

Releasing my hold with a curse I sprang to the table. Knocking this aside in the path of the servants I made a hasty clutch at the revolver. Kerr had it. There was nothing to do but flee as best I could and I dived through the open door to the porch, leaving the room in darkness, for the lamp had gone out with the fall of the table.

If Tom had aided me we would have mastered Kerr then and there and gained the revolver. But that rotten sickness had numbed him, and I was forced to quit the House of Hidden Faces. I made a last effort, though, to get Craig free. Running to the out-houses, I grappled at the fastenings of the door of his shed. It was padlocked.

"Bailey?" I heard his quick voice from within. "Are they after you? No use to try the door."

I gave over wrestling with the fastening, and listened, panting. I could hear men running up from the house.

"Get into the rock tunnels," hissed Craig. I had reason to be thankful for his quickness of thought, for it saved my life. "At the right of the waterfall. I have heard they lead to the place of the doctor-men. Reach Helen, if you can, and quickly. Kerr told me—he is going to take her from there by force—good luck!"

The Chinamen came into view then, and I could waste no more time at the hut. With Craig's heartening cry in my ears I ran off into the shadows by the waterfall. The sound of the waters drowned the noise of pursuit and I pressed ahead to the right. It was dark now, but I could not afford to feel my way.

A black expanse of rock opened before me and far ahead I sighted a glimmer of moonlight. This must be the passage Craig had spoken of. The Chinamen had probably delayed briefly at the out-houses and I lost no time in climbing up the tunnel. It seemed to be a small passage, one of the openings in the rock made by the ancient volcanic action. The moonlight glimmer proved to be a ray from one of the craters, and it lighted my path for some distance.

I saw that the passage opened into others, and I was forced to run ahead haphazard, without knowing which tunnel led to the hall of the doctor-men. If the communicating passages baffled me, they must also puzzle my pursuers. So when I had gone for some distance I slowed down to a walk. Listening intently, I could hear no sound of the others. I was now alone in the rock chambers of the *malemba* lakes, without knowledge of my course, and with Kerr's men after me.

Truly, there was little hope ahead of me. Craig had heartened me, but he did not know that Helen Carnie, the Golden Queen of the *tulaitus*, was mad. Yes, I did not relish my coming visit to the hall of the doctor-men if I should be lucky enough to win through. I had seen how closely the Golden Queen was guarded, and by whom.

There was another chance. I had come to the conclusion that some way must open out on Vata Lavum. Not the *mlurga* gates, but a passage or canal where John Kerr had brought in the material and furnishings to build his house, and his comrades the doctor-men could get to the outer world. Craig had said that they went out. But my chance of locating this exit was one in a thousand. It wasn't any use to turn back, however, and I kept on, advancing through the passages without pause, lighted frequently by a glimmer of moonlight from some cleft in the rocks.

In this manner I must have gone some miles, although I had no way of telling how far I was from the place where I had started, when I began to hear the chants of the *tulaitus* and saw the gleam of their lanterns ahead.

A party of the little men were coming toward me, swinging their lanterns. I kept on, rather than go back. When they saw me they silenced their songs for a space, watching me. But they stepped aside and let me pass, for which I was thankful. It wasn't the *tulaitus* that gave me food for thought, but what came after them.

I had quickened my pace again when the

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moonlight ahead showed me something approaching. At first I took it for an animal. Presently it revealed itself as one of the masked creatures of the doctor-men, with a mask made like a dog's head, moving along on hands and knees. As I neared it, the thing stood up.

The beastly smell of the thing struck my nostrils as I passed it, watchfully, on the other side of the passage. It made no movement to stop me, staring at me out of its mask. But after I had passed I looked back. The creature had fallen again to hands and knees and was hurrying along the passage in this fashion.

XV

FOR some hours I wandered the rock passages of the *malemba* lakes. As nearly as I could I kept to one direction, praying that it would lead me to the hall of the doctor-men, and to the Golden Queen.

I had looked back along the passage I was in, on a warning impulse, and my heart gave a great leap. Some distance behind me in the moonlight I made out a confused mass moving toward me, and heard a muttering cry. As the mass approached I made it out more clearly. Down the passage after me were coming the masked followers of the doctor-men. Some were on all fours; some were scrambling along on their feet, their hideous masks turning this way and that. In the likeness of dog, wolf and monkey, they were after me, whining and calling as they came.

In a second I was running down the passage. The pursuers sighted me and gave chase, silencing their cry. I did not stop to wonder whether Kerr had set them on my trail or whether the one I had passed had warned them that I was ahead in the tunnels. They came scurrying along, and turn and twist as I would in the passages, they kept close behind.

As I ran a loathsome fear tugged at my heart. What manner of men were these dog-faced ones? How could they follow me without seeing me, unless they actually smelled my tracks? Were they men, behind those beast masks, or animals?

I never ran as I ran then, fleeing down one passage and up another, with the masked pack behind me. As I ran I thought of what Craig had said. The Golden Queen could save me from the pack. Where was the hall of the doctor-men? Had my course carried me toward it; or away from it into the mountain?

For all that I knew each turning I took might lead me to a blind passage and pen me against a wall of rock. Yet I saw that the passages were becoming wider, and this spurred me on. Quickly as I had come, the pack was drawing nearer to me.

Yes, they were close behind me when I burst from the passage into a lighted cavern. Dazzled by the glare I stopped. As my eyes grew used to the light, I saw that I had come out in the space that was the antechamber of the doctor-men. I stood in the great plateau before the hall of the doctor-men, and the Golden Queen.

The place was full of the *tulaitus*, each one carrying a lantern, all squatted on the floor. They were watching one of the doctor-men who stood in front of the archway. I saw that it was Cha Tara.

The masked pack was almost at my heels. In another moment they would be upon me. Some of the *tulaitus* had already sighted me, and risen to their feet. With a last glance over my shoulder I ran forward, among the *tulaitus*.

Straight to Doctor-man Cha Tara I went, with the masked creatures stumbling after me in the crowd. The assemblage gave way in fright at sight of the pack pursuing me. I strode to Cha Tara and threw up my hand.

"Mercy!" I called. "Mercy for a hunted man! Aid and mercy from the Golden Queen!"

God knows I was badly scared, and the words stumbled off my lips. I hoped Cha Tara would call off the pack, at this. I had not looked for what happened. For the curtain over the interior chamber was pulled aside slowly. The white figure of Helen Carnie appeared through the curtains.

She advanced through the round chamber of the doctor-men and stepped out under the arch. Cha Tara drew aside at her coming, and cried out something in his native tongue. To a man, the *tulaitus* flung themselves forward on their faces. The doctor-men in the assemblage bowed their heads. Only the masked pack remained staring at the white figure of the girl. And at a word from the doctor-men, they retreated to the passage, muttering.

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Helen Carnie looked around the assemblage with her slow tranquil gaze. Her wonderful hair framed the delicate, pale face. Her hands were crossed on her throat. She did not seem to see me, yet I thought her gaze had rested on me.

"Who calls for the Golden Queen?" she said, in a low, musical voice.

She turned to Cha Tara as she spoke. Yet her face was already blank as if she had forgotten her words. The worshipers in the outer space rose to their knees and watched. I felt the gaze of the doctor-men on me, through their masks, and could not guess at their feelings.

"It was a doomed man," said Cha Tara, "O Golden Queen, it was one hunted by the pack. He came to your sanctuary."

The glance of the mad girl did not turn to me. She frowned as if trying to think, and a shudder twitched her slender shoulders. Even in my weariness I marveled at her beauty.

"If some one has come to the place of the Golden Queen," the voice of the girl echoed, "let him come to the sanctuary."

She tossed her gold curls with one hand, humming softly to herself. Cha Tara bowed, but made no movement.

"O Golden Queen," he said. "This man will die, because it has been asked by one who is of the doctor-men. The pack was ordered to find him and slay him."

That was cheering news for me. I knew that Kerr had been at the bottom of this. Cha Tara was bound to carry out the wishes of the white man who belonged to the witch-doctors. Helen Carnie seemed not to have understood what he said. A hundred things were on the tip of my tongue. Here was this girl, daughter of a white man, who could save me with a word. Yet to plead with her might frighten or puzzle her. I had to wait to hear what she would say.

"This man who was hunted," she replied, smiling, "he has a white face, like the Golden Queen. Why should he die?"

Cha Tara crossed his arms and his gilt mask turned from me to the girl.

"The man who is doomed," he objected, "may be white, but he is an intruder in the *malemba* lakes, and he is not kin to the Golden Queen, who has the color of fire in her hair and the light of Lelemis in her eyes."

The Golden Queen shook her head, still smiling.

"The pack has followed him far in the passages," went on Cha Tara, who seemed to have my death all planned out, "and it is not well to call them off, when the man is doomed, O Queen of the *tulaitus*."

My life hung on the next word of the Golden Queen, for the other doctor-men had closed around us, and I knew that it would take little for them to throw me out to the masked creatures beyond. The worst of it was that I could say nothing. No appeal would influence the mad girl.

"If he is doomed, Cha Tara," she said slowly, as if considering it, "why does he not belong to the Golden Queen? Who else watches over the spirits of those who die?"

XVI

THERE was a murmur from the other doctor-men at this. And Cha Tara turned to them, as if puzzled. Helen Carnie watched them smilingly. I wondered how such words came to the tongue of the mad girl. Then I remembered that half-witted folk pick up the language of those around them. Probably she had heard Cha Tara's gibberish, and was merely repeating it. All the same, it was uncanny—Helen Carnie whom they had taken for their god, repeating the words of the *malemba* legend. I think it saved my life, at that.

"The Golden Queen lives apart from the men of *malemba*," said Cha Tara at length. "If it is her wish, the white man shall live—for a time. Those who are chased by the pack must die, for the pack can not be called off."

Helen Carnie stretched out her hand to him with a pleased smile. She looked like a child who is given a toy she likes.

"The spirit of the Golden Queen," she declared, "was in the shades of Lelemis, where the doomed drive their dogs, when she heard her name called. She will return to her chamber with the one who called her, but without her servants."

Cha Tara and the others bowed again at this. They certainly held the Golden Queen in great reverence. I gave a long breath of relief. It might only put off my death for an hour, but I was safe for the present.

The Golden Queen took me by the hand and led me through the round chamber of

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the doctor-men to her own room behind the curtain. She closed the curtain, and made her way to the couch. Taking up some flowers which lay on the silk coverings beside a basket of fruit and yams, she began to twine a rough kind of wreath with them.

Motioning me to sit in front of her, she completed the wreath with a smile. Then she placed it on my head, humming lightly. We were alone in the place, but as she did this I saw a corner of the curtain drop into place and guessed that Cha Tara had been keeping an eye on us. The girl reclined on the couch, seemingly pleased with her handiwork, her beautiful face close to mine—so close that I caught the fragrance of her hair, and saw the pulse beating at her smooth throat.

She nibbled at stripped coconut, watching me the while from wide gray eyes. The eyes were blank as a baby's, yet they held mine. For a long moment I gazed into the eyes of the Golden Queen. They were like pools of shadowy water, over which the sunlight flickers. Gradually the expression in their depths changed. They were still childlike, but for the first time they seemed to focus on me.

The expression in the eyes did not change, but the voice of the Golden Queen came to my ears in a whisper. The voice of the mad girl, who could save me and Craig, her lover, if she could understand our plight.

"Where is Bernard Craig?" the voice said, so low that I could hardly catch it.

I stared into the face of the beautiful girl, fool that I was, and my jaw dropped.

"Where is Craig?" she repeated. "Where have they put him?"

I couldn't do anything but stare. The wide eyes of the girl were the same as before, the same sweet smile played around her lips. She touched the flowers in my crown here and there with a slender hand.

The face of the Golden Queen was the same, but her words were the words of a normal person.

"Speak softly," said the Golden Queen. "There are keen ears outside the room. Tell me what I want to know. I heard John Kerr speaking to Cha Tara, and he said Bernard Craig was in Malemba. And Brocky Tom."

It made my flesh creep to hear the girl talk as she did, with that vacant look on her face. But it was joy that sent the cold chills up and down my back. Helen Carnie had come to her senses, partly at least. She knew of Craig, and she could understand what I said in spite of the look in those gray eyes.

"Craig is imprisoned in an out-house of Kerr's," I told her, hardly believing my ears. "Brocky Tom is there, too—sick. I just had a fight with Kerr and he started the masked pack on my trail. Is your memory——"

"Sh!" she warned me. "We must not be heard. Oh, it is terrible to have to face those men, and I think I would be truly mad in a little while. But I am not mad. After that night at New Caledonia I was unconscious for a long time, and I fell sick on the schooner, so sick that John Kerr was forced to take me to land. I had not fully recovered when we came to the *malemba* lakes. I hated John Kerr. When he told the doctor-men here mockingly that I was their Golden Queen, they believed it. Between the two fates, I chose to come to the hall of the witch-doctors."

Her eyes had left my face and fixed on the curtain that separated us from the others.

"Cha Tara thought I was mad when they first brought me here," whispered the girl. "And I kept up the pretense, as you saw. Oh, it was hard, with them watching me. And John Kerr came. He did not believe I was mad. I think he made Cha Tara suspect the truth a little. But the others believed that my spirit was in Lelemis, as they said."

The girl's words cleared away the puzzle, and my pulse quickened. She went on to tell me briefly the story of what happened in New Caledonia. Craig and John Kerr had both visited there often. Her father had distrusted both, Craig because of his past, Kerr on account of his black record. She had seen, though, that Craig loved her. Kerr had come to the plantation ostensibly to sell some pearls. He had planned the massacre that followed by the Vata Lavum men.

While the house was burning and Brocky Tom was seeking her, Kerr had found her and taken her to the schooner, where she had lain ill and until they reached the House of Hidden Faces.

Such was the tale of Helen Carnie, and though she skipped over the sorrow and suffering she had been through, I read between the words. Not once did her eyes wander from the curtains, or the foolish

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smile on her lips alter. Yet when I told her of our captivity in the House of Hidden Faces, and the sickness of Brocky Tom, she lifted her hands and pressed them to her eyes.

"Not that!" she cried in a voice that made my heart ache. "Not Brocky Tom! Oh, how could they do that? There is no hope for him, now that they have put on the mask."

"It is the crawling sickness," she went on, dropping her hands from a white face. "The witch-doctors have made him into a beast. He will be like the others with the masks, an animal without a soul. It is so terrible that they make them wear the masks when the disease reaches a certain point. They do it to all intruders here, and *tulaitus* who have offended them."

Her words gave me a cold chill. I had had those creatures on my trail, not many moments ago. Still, I thought, she must be imagining that men could be changed into animals. When she told me all she knew, however, I did not doubt it.

It seemed that the witch-doctors had the secret of a virus with which they infected their enemies. The disease was a form of hydrophobia, of the less malignant kind. It was not deadly, but it turned men into snapping, biting beasts who hungered for blood. I had heard of this form of disease before, in the tropics where the heat was great. The doctor-men had developed it in some way of their own. It was sad to think of Brocky Tom. I remembered his visit at night to my room with a shudder.

No wonder the girl had been able to counterfeit madness, with such things before her all the time. Yet she had preferred them to John Kerr and his schooner. Craig had spoken truly when he said the Golden Queen was our one hope. She alone could take us from Malemba. I had no idea how it could be done, nor, I think, had she. I know that she wanted to get to Craig before it was too late, and I was resolved to help her.

Here we were, an unarmed man and a girl, in the sanctuary of the Golden Queen, guarded by the doctor-men. They would not let her leave the place, much less me. And outside was the masked pack, waiting, and John Kerr. To make matters worse Helen Carnie told me that the way Kerr had entered the *malemba* lakes with her lay behind the House of Hidden Faces. She remembered that the entrance was by the waterfall. Probably I had passed it in running from the servants of Kerr.

We had been talking eagerly together, and for once the blank look had fallen from her beautiful face. I saw a startled look appear in her gray eyes, which at once froze to their vacant stare. Her lips parted in the childlike smile. I cast a look over my shoulder.

The curtain had been drawn back. The tall figure of Cha Tara was in the doorway gazing at us from the holes of his mask. How long he had been there, I did not know.

XVII

"WHY do you look at the Golden Queen, Cha Tara," said Helen Carnie in her soft voice, "is the Golden Queen a slave, to be watched?"

Cha Tara made no reply. I would have given much to know what was going on behind his mask. The girl had said that Cha Tara did not believe wholly in her madness. He must have heard part of what we had said. I got to my feet quietly, but Helen Carnie faced him without change of expression.

"I said that my servants were not to come to my room," she went on, frowning, "and you are one of my servants. What brings you here?"

Still the doctor-man did not speak. His silence was beginning to get on my nerves. Little by little I edged closer to him. If Cha Tara showed signs of calling his mates, I was going to risk a leap for him.

"Go!" said Helen Carnie imperiously. "Leave me, Cha Tara!"

Then the chief of the doctor-men bowed his head and raised one arm slowly.

"Aye, favored of the gods," he said. "I shall go, but the white man must come with me. His time is ended. The masked pack waits."

It was clear enough what he wanted. Cha Tahra, in his devilish cunning, sought to test the Golden Queen. If she let me go, his suspicions would probably be silenced. If she tried to protect me, it would mean trouble for her. The girl's pretended madness could not stand that test.

Well, for a moment the girl and the witch-doctor faced each other, the sweet, blank eyes of one looking into the gleaming eyes

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behind the mask. Cha Tara waited for the Golden Queen to speak. Once again I had to keep silence while the plucky girl decided my fate. Would she try to protect me, at a heavy cost? Craig's chance of safety hung on it, too, because if she were suspected by the witch-doctors, her power would be lost.

The Golden Queen played with one of the strands of her loose hair and smiled softly to herself.

"I had a dream while I was among the shades of Lelemis, Cha Tara. The winds whispered it to me in the place where the *malemba* flames are kept burning. I dreamed that the white men who came here are loved by the many-faced gods. If harm should happen to them, the gods would be angry. No offerings, even of human flesh would satisfy them."

She pointed around her, and I saw the ring of carved wooden *totems* grinning down at us. Cha Tara thought for a moment.

"The dream might be true, O Golden Queen," he said shrewdly. "But one of the witch-doctors, John Kerr, is a white man, and he is the one who ordered the death of this man. If white men are loved by the many-faced gods, John Kerr must be high in their favor, for he is one of us."

The Golden Queen shook her head.

"The white man, John Kerr, is not liked by the gods, for he laid his hand on the Golden Queen of Malemba. If his hand is not to be trusted, Cha Tara, how can we trust his word? His order must not be carried out."

"If the man who is named John Kerr offended you, O Golden Queen, he is still one of us. And the masked pack can not be called off. They have been told to kill."

The girl was silent, her chin propped on her hand. Cha Tara had taken the side of John Kerr.

"Is the will of a witch-doctor stronger than the will of the Golden Queen?" she cried. And I blessed the girl under my breath, for she was risking her life to keep me from the pack. "I forbid the white man to be taken from here. If you lay hand on him, the anger of the powers of Lelemis will be turned against you."

Cha Tara bowed and folded his arms. I gained a yard nearer him.

"The powers of Lelemis will not be angered," he declared, "for they love the smell of fresh blood. The pack must kill its victim."

The corners of the girl's lips trembled slightly. She sprang from her couch.

"No!" she cried. "You must not do that. Don't you see—these men are being murdered for John Kerr. Craig will be the next——"

For a second she had forgotten her part. She bit her lip, but the words had been said. Cha Tara had seen the light of sanity in her eyes, and heard her speak the name of the man who loved her. Helen Carnie was not the first woman who had lost much because of great love. The witch-doctor turned toward the curtain.

"The Golden Queen shall see with her own eyes." He laughed softly. "She will see a victim offered up to the many-faced gods. And it will please her. For her mind is in Lelemis."

I did not see the stricken look on the face of the girl who had staked all and lost. Cha Tara had turned his back to me as he spoke, in his triumph. I was a scant two paces from him, and his last word ended in a grunt. I had struck his throat under the mask with the flat of my hand, using the side as the edge of a blade. It was a trick I had learned from the Japs. Anyway, it put a stop to Cha Tara's tongue for a while. Which was what I wanted.

I caught him at the waist as he spun around. Taken by surprise, it wasn't hard to throw him to the stone floor. We hardly made any noise, owing to his long robe which tangled his limbs. I felt his hot breath on my face, and saw that the mask had slipped, half-strangling him.

In a second I had got a scissors-lock around his waist with my legs, and a strangle hold on his throat. The mask aided me in this, for it hindered his breathing besides preventing him from crying out. I grinned up at Helen Carnie reassuringly as she bent over us, hands gripping her throat, and her eyes wide with fear.

Gradually I could feel Cha Tara's limbs relax and his gasping for breath grew so loud I feared they would hear it in the outer chamber. I didn't let up until the gasping was near stifled, for I trusted Cha Tara about as much as an injured snake, and our lives hung on his silence.

When he was unconscious, I got to my feet, and took a look outside through the crack in the curtain. In the outer chamber

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the witch-doctors were seated on their stone benches, with a fire burning in the center of the place. Beyond them I could make out the ranks of the *tulaitus*, seated on the floor. I could not see the masked pack, but judged they were not far off. A number of canoes were drawn up in the canal.

Dropping the curtain, I turned to Cha Tara. Motioning Helen Carnie to silence, I stripped the heavy mask from his head. I saw a broad yellow face, swollen and flushed, with black hair. Cha Tara, as I suspected, was of Chinese descent. His robe was a filthy brown garment wound around him from foot to neck. I unwound it, and shoved the unconscious doctor-man under the couch.

Helen Carnie watched me, scarcely breathing, as she saw what I was going to do. It cost me a shudder to put on the brown robe, but I did it. It covered me completely, even my shoes. The mask was next. Ugh! How it smelled. It had a mixed stink of tobacco, betel-nut, and liquor, with a lot of other things. But it served its purpose.

I could see out of the eye-holes pretty well, and the cloth flap covered my neck and the back of my head. Cha Tara had been tall, so we seemed about the same height. To all appearances, I was now Cha Tara, chief of the doctor-men and guardian of the Golden Queen.

With a whispered word to the girl as to what we must do, and a clasp of the hand I stepped to the curtain and flung it back. The Golden Queen and her servant, Cha Tara, were about to go through the assemblage of the doctor-men and the *tulaitus* to the canoes. It was risky of course, but it was a chance, and it wouldn't do to stay where we were.

Well, when I drew back the curtain I expected the witch-doctors to fall on their knees and the *tulaitus* to prostrate themselves. But nothing of the kind happened. The anteroom and the floor beyond were in confusion. All the worshipers of the Golden Queen had sprung to their feet, and a murmur went up all around the place. I thought at first that the masked pack were among them. Then I saw the true reason.

The crowd divided to right and left in the center, and I could see through to the water. Up the cleared space a white man was coming. In his shirt sleeves, with a revolver, I saw John Kerr. He was coming toward the sanctuary.

XVIII

JOHN KERR'S face was flushed as if from liquor, and his narrowed eyes flickered at the assemblage. I saw that several of the Chinamen had landed from his canoe and were armed with rifles. He was coming toward us alone, however.

Whatever his faults, John Kerr was not a coward. He did not slow down his pace as he stepped under the arch and confronted the witch-doctors. He wore a mocking smile. He had come, I guessed, for the woman he called his wife. He was going to take the Golden Queen from the hall of the doctor-men, as he had promised Craig he would.

John Kerr had taken what he desired in all the South Seas. Even the power of the doctor-men of Malemba would not keep him from taking Helen Carnie. I read that in his face. The next instant the girl had stepped past me into the antechamber in front of the fire. John Kerr saw her and his smile faded. He did not see me, as I was partly concealed by the curtain.

The witch-doctors drew close about the two. John Kerr, however, paid them no attention. His gaze was fixed on the girl. She made no movement. For an instant the white man cast a keen glance over the gathered *tulaitus*. I stayed where I was.

The coming of John Kerr had taken me by surprise. I couldn't accomplish anything by going out to the two. And then John Kerr made a step forward. He stooped and wound one arm around the girl's knees. A sudden jerk of his powerful shoulders and she was poised high on his arm.

Kerr wheeled and started back toward the canoe. As he did so several of the witch-doctors jumped forward, angered at the insult to the Golden Queen. Kerr's weapon lifted and flashed. Two of the witch-doctors stumbled and fell, at the reports. The others hesitated at this, and the white man gained the outer space.

The Chinamen had taken alarm at the sound of the revolver, and opened on the crowd of *tulaitus* with their rifles. The doctor-men made a rush after Kerr through the archway, but I heard his weapon crack

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again and they scattered among the *tulaitus*.

The place was a riot of sound and confusion now, with the *tulaitus* scrambling over each other to get into their canoes, under fire from the rifles. Shrieks and groans echoed in the cavern. I thought I saw some of the masked pack running about, but I could not be sure. Some of the doctor-men had disappeared into the passages and I guessed they had gone for their followers.

It was up to me to get out of the hall of the doctor-men, for I saw John Kerr would get clear with the girl. The *tulaitus* had been scattered by the fire of the Chinamen and he was nearly to the canoe. I jumped over the wounded witch-doctors in the archway and dodged toward the canal among the mass of men. Keeping well to the side, I avoided most of the Chinamen's shots. I had to knock the little *tulaitus* right and left with my fists to clear a path, however.

The shots had ceased when I reached the edge of the canal. I saw Kerr's big canoe pulling off into the shadows with him and the girl in the stern. So it was that John Kerr braved the witch-doctors of Malemba, for the sake of a woman. In the end it cost him dear. John Kerr had been allied to the witch-doctors, but now he had defied them in their hall.

I had escaped notice, owing to my mask. I was not eager to meet any of the other doctor-men, however, and I couldn't afford to lose track of Kerr's canoe. In front of me one of the *tulaitus* was trying to push a canoe free of the land. In a second I was in the craft and had tossed its occupant out.

Catching up a paddle I swung the bow of the canoe around after the one Kerr was in. The other craft had a long start. It was a large canoe, however, and the one I was in seemed to be built for speed, being small and well shaped. By putting forth all my strength I managed to keep the one I was following in sight until we had left the hall of the Golden Queen behind us and the confusion had died into the distance.

There was no sign of another canoe coming after us and I wondered at that, for the doctor-men were certain to take up the pursuit with their followers. Keeping the light in Kerr's canoe in sight I followed it unobserved through a number of channels. It was still in sight when it drew up at the jetty in front of the House of Hidden Faces. In the light from the windows I saw Kerr leave the canoe with Helen Carnie, followed by the Chinamen who cast fearful glances back over their shoulders.

It wouldn't be healthy for me, I guessed, to go to the jetty in my present attire. So I turned the prow of the canoe aside and landed some distance from the house, in the semi-darkness of the fungoid growth. Pushing the craft free of the shore, I tore off my mask and robe. These I tossed into the weeds. Making my way over the glowing network of filaments, I came out near the out-houses in the rear of the House of Hidden Faces.

Some Chinamen were standing on the front space with their rifles pointed at the canal. They seemed badly scared, and it was probably only fear of John Kerr that kept them out there waiting for pursuing canoes to heave into sight.

Giving the house a wide berth, I crept among the out-houses by the waterfall. It was nearly dark here. The place seemed deserted. I made out the bamboo hut where Craig had been kept, and it wasn't long before I was tugging at the fastenings of the padlock. It was my first chance at the lock, now that the Chinamen weren't keeping their close watch over me.

The lock was an old one, held by staples in the woodwork. I had picked up a pointed stake, and this served to insert under the staples. A heave or two and they began to give. A face showed at the window and I heard Craig's eager voice.

"What luck, Bailey?" he whispered.

I cautioned him to silence, working away as fast as I could, for there was no telling when things might begin to happen at the house. One after the other the staples fell out. I pulled off the lock and the door swung open. Bernard Craig walked out and caught my hand in a heartfelt grip.

"Fine work, Bailey!" he whispered. "Now tell me what's going on? Did you get to the Golden Queen?"

Yes, I had been to the Golden Queen. Without doubt, I had. I told him in a few words what had happened at the hall of the doctor-men.

He listened attentively. He was thin, and pale. But his eyes were alert and his head was high.

"Yes," he said, noticing my look, "I've been on short rations, Bailey. Mostly bananas. So Helen Carnie is free of the

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witch-people, but in Kerr's hands. There will be a scrap here soon. Where is Brocky Tom?"

I shook my head, not liking to tell him.

"He has—a mask on," I said at length. "Kerr put it on. You know——"

"God!" he breathed. "Poor old Tom. Yes, Bailey, I know. Kerr took pains to tell me he had started Tom on your track. The man's disease has made him little better than a bloodhound. Listen!"

I couldn't hear anything, but my companion's ears had been sharpened by his confinement in the hut. Likewise his eyes were accustomed to the gloom. I saw him look, not toward the house, but at the dark mouth of the rock passage beside the waterfall in back of us.

"Kerr and Helen Carnie are still in the house," I ventured. "The Chinamen are mounting guard in front of the house. They won't be much use, though, if it comes to an attack in force by the doctor-men and their horde. Do you think John Kerr is going to defend the house?"

"I heard something moving in the rock passage," whispered Craig, bending close. "No, Kerr won't try to stay in the house. It can't be defended, even if he had the men. They could keep the canoes away, perhaps, but not men attacking from the white forest or the passage behind us. He must have some other purpose. I can guess what it is. I have watched from my window the last two weeks, and I have seen what was going on. The path alongside the waterfall leads to the outside of the mountain. The stream must come from the outside."

"Helen Carnie said that it did," I told him.

He was silent at that, thinking. Quiet had fallen on the House of Hidden Faces. The lake, too, was still. The house was ablaze with lights and every now and then a shadow crossed by a window. Once I thought it was John Kerr.

XIX

I CAUGHT Craig by the arm suddenly.

"That passage," I cried. "It leads to the hall of the doctor-men. I went through it. The doctor-men must be coming here through it now. They may be here any minute!"

Craig nodded. He had thought of that. The passage opened out not a hundred yards from where we were standing. If the doctor-men arrived at its mouth they would cut off Kerr from the exit by the waterfall. I scanned it, the sweat breaking out on my forehead.

"Steady, Bailey," whispered Craig. "Kerr knows that as well as we do. We'll have to wait and see what he is going to do. If we try to get into the house now we'll receive a bullet for our pains."

He was right. We couldn't get within stone's throw of the place without being seen. The glow from the windows lighted up the lawn for a hundred paces on every side. In the house was Helen Carnie, with the man who was our enemy.

Where were the doctor-men? I felt that they were coming through the rock passages, with the masked pack leaping and trotting at their heels. They must be near by now. Sweat was running down my body, at the thought. Craig also was pale. We strained our ears. The silence was unbroken. Oh, it was a bad moment, that we stood there, our pulses hammering, and waited. Yet I was not prepared for what was to come. Craig's whisper made me jump.

"Look!" he whispered, touching my arm.

John Kerr and Helen Carnie were coming toward us from the House of Hidden Faces. The white man was leading her, almost carrying the girl. They were alone.

Straight down the path toward the outhouses they came, the girl glancing anxiously about her. She must have been thinking of Craig, whom she supposed shut up in one of the huts. Kerr had his revolver and was looking back over his shoulder. I think he had left unknown to the Chinamen, who were still on the space in front of the house where they couldn't see him.

Craig drew me back farther into the shadows. We could not be seen by the two approaching us. Kerr's course took him directly to the waterfall, to the path that led upward along the bank of the stream where we stood. As she passed the huts the girl said something to Kerr. I think she was pleading for him to free Craig. He did not slacken his steps, dragging her with him. I could see that she was crying.

They passed us so close that we could have touched them. I felt Craig lean forward with a sharp intake of breath as he saw

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John Kerr strike the girl, who was hanging back. She gave a low cry.

I thought at first it was the blow that had made her cry out. But it was something else. They had gained the path that led up beside the waterfall. It was narrow, being between the stream and the rock wall. In the gloom of the place I saw a figure framed in the entrance. It rose before John Kerr and the girl.

I could make out that it was a huge form, topped by one of the hideous masks. Had the masked pack arrived at the House of Hidden Faces? The man was swaying on his feet, grasping what seemed to be a long stick. His hands were chained together, but his feet were free.

"Brocky Tom," cried Craig. "It was Tom we heard a moment ago. Look!"

Kerr had halted and seemed to be speaking to the man in the mask. The noise of the waterfall drowned what he said. The girl had drawn back at the sight of the newcomer. The grinning mask of a beast added to the man's height as he loomed over Kerr, his arms moving slowly back and forth, the muscles rippling on his bare shoulders. He seemed to crouch forward, peering at the two in front of him.

John Kerr pushed the girl behind him. I heard him speak more sharply. Brocky Tom was poised in the path. There was no passing him unless he moved. And he did not move. I read menace in his attitude. Kerr, however, seemed indifferent.

I recalled the words of John Kerr, spoken in mockery of the sick man when he put on the mask. He had branded Brocky Tom as a beast, slavering to kill. The stricken man had seen Helen Carnie. Had his memory left him, or did he know the golden-haired girl? Would he let her pass?

John Kerr grew impatient, and gave the man in the path a heavy blow to make him step one side. Instantly both arms of Brocky Tom raised over his head. I saw Kerr's revolver lift in sudden alarm. Before he could shoot, the chained hands of the giant had knocked the weapon from his grasp. Helen Carnie screamed. Craig and I leaped from our shelter.

As I ran, I saw that Brocky Tom had caught Kerr to him, passing his chained wrists over the other's head, in a grip Kerr was powerless to break. I heard John Kerr curse as he strained against the form that held him. He beat at Brocky Tom with his fists, against the grinning mask he had put on the man.

And as Craig and I reached the spot, Brocky Tom shifted his grip. He had the other around the waist now, between his chained arms. The muscles of his shoulders swelled. With a lurch he raised the form of John Kerr over his heaving chest, up over his head.

A hoarse shout broke from Brocky Tom's victim. I saw John Kerr's eyeballs gleam as he twisted and turned helplessly. He sensed his death already in the grip of the man-with-a-mask. Brocky Tom planted his feet firmly. He swayed slightly, his muscles cracking under the strain.

And then he beat the body of John Kerr against the rock wall. At the first blow the body grew limp, for the force of it was great. Again and again Brocky Tom crashed the head and shoulders of the man who had maimed him against the rock. I could see dark blood running down the giant's shoulders. But it was the blood of John Kerr. Aye, and the brains and splinters of bone. After Kerr was a mangled corpse, Brocky Tom thrust him against the rock, and at length cast him into the pool under the waterfall.

Craig had caught the girl who was on the point of fainting. I saw him whisper to her, and the quick light that came in her eyes. Motioning me to follow, Craig drew the girl past Brocky Tom when the latter moved to the edge of the pool, and up the path. Yet when we were safely by him, the girl turned back with her arms out.

"Tom," she cried pitifully, "Brocky Tom, come with us."

The giant turned at her cry and strode to her. Craig and I stepped forward, dreading the man, but he halted in front of the girl, peering at her. A cry came from his lips, such a cry as I have never heard. It was full of a blasting pain, the cry of a man who knew himself lost. He touched the white gown of the girl with his bloody hand, and she did not shrink back.

"Come with me, Tom," she whispered, her hands clasped.

But the man remained motionless. He made no move to attack us, his head hanging. Craig caught my arm.

"Take the girl, Bailey," he whispered.

I drew her a little space up the path. Looking over my shoulder I saw Craig lift

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the mask that was on Brocky Tom. The light was too poor for me to glimpse the face of the stricken man. But Craig saw it, and his hand fell to his side. The giant stared at him mutely through the holes of the mask, which had fallen back into place.

At that instant things broke loose around the House of Hidden Faces. I heard a roar from the house, and saw a crowd of the masked pack emerging from the white forest and from canoes at the waterfront. A few shots sounded, and the Chinamen fled toward us. From the rock passage near us more of the masked figures leaped to meet them. The doctor-men had come to the House of Hidden Faces.

XX

THE space below us seemed filled with struggling forms as the unfortunate Chinamen went down under the pack. I closed the ears of the girl against the clamor and urged her up the path. Craig was beside us in an instant.

We had not been seen, and we pressed forward, under guidance of Craig who was able to make out the path. Below us the clamor continued as the doctor-men and their pack rushed through the house and the grounds searching for Kerr and the girl. Of the Chinamen nothing was to be seen except a few tattered figures strung over the grounds. It sickened me when I looked back and saw what the masked pack had done to them.

We were making the best of the time we had gained. But the path was steep and I knew that the men below would not lose much time in overtaking us once they took it into their heads to come after us.

Sure enough, in a minute the tumult quieted a little. Looking down over my shoulder I saw them running toward the huts and the waterfall, led by several of the doctor-men. They paused only a second to search the deserted huts, and then ran to the path. The doctor-men knew of the exit and they guessed that Kerr would have taken it.

Craig and the girl had gone ahead and I waited to be sure the pursuers would come up the path. And then I saw a strange thing. As the doctor-men gained the entrance to the path, the great figure of Brocky Tom rose before them, barring the way. The strong light which had eclipsed the glow of the white forest played on his masked figure.

For an instant they halted in surprise. Brocky Tom had recovered his heavy stick, and he did not budge from the path, standing slightly above them. The hesitation of the pack did not last long, and in a body they rushed forward.

Brocky Tom's club rose over his head, in both chained hands, and lashed at the thick of his assailants. I saw a masked body fall into the pool under the waterfall, and others sink to the ground. The light seemed to increase strangely, and I saw the House of Hidden Faces was on fire. Its flames made the scene below me stand out clearly.

The giant was planted firmly in the path, and as fast as the pack rushed at him, he beat them back. His club rose and fell like a scythe, and the bodies of the attackers were flung back crushed, to fall into the pool for the most part. As they pressed against him, Brocky Tom gave ground a little, retreating higher on the path, but his club did not cease its deadly work.

For a time I hastened on, fearing to delay. The others were some distance ahead by now. When I reached a turn in the trail I looked back. The struggling men were far below me now, but the flames showed them clearly.

The masked pack had drawn back before the man who guarded the path. They stood before him in a circle, snarling and threatening while Brocky Tom leaned on his club watching them. As I looked they came against him again. His club beat at them. A knot of men formed around him, but his club wielded by all the power of his frame made play over their heads. It was a brave stand that Brocky Tom made, in the path by the waterfall. Was it for us that he did it? Or was it savagery, aroused by the threatening pack? I like to think he did it for us.

As I started around the turn in the trail I saw that Brocky Tom's club had been torn from him. But with his chained fists, he was beating at the pack which was climbing upon him.

I ran then with the fear of what was behind me in my heart. And before I knew it I saw the moonlight glimmer on the path in front of me. The rock had given way to the branches of trees. A cool breeze touched my face.

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The trail led down now, for it had left the stream, and we had come out of the mountain. It was a welcome sight to see the stars overhead, and the green forest of Vata Lavum before me. It was more welcome still to find Craig and the girl waiting anxiously for me.

As we raced down the mountain-side following the trail, I told them what I had seen at the foot of the waterfall, and we blessed Brocky Tom for the respite he had given us. The path had come out not far from the shore, and before long we found ourselves running beside an inlet. Helen Carnie was nearly exhausted. Craig and I took turns in supporting her. So far as we knew the pursuers had not come out of the mountain.

The trail followed the course of the inlet which broadened as we went along. It led us into a ravine which sheltered a cove. In the cove we saw the form of a schooner outlined by the moonlight, at anchor with reefed sails. Craig was the first to guess what the schooner was.

"Kerr's boat," he cried. "The *Anniel* This is where he kept her."

He was right, as we found out on boarding her, swimming out to do it. The girl swam with us, and as we jumped to the windlass, the fear of the masked pack lending us strength, she tugged the reef-knots loose. The white robe clung to her form, and the moonlight shone on her golden hair as she worked. The sight put nerve into us. The anchor came up with a rush under our efforts, and Craig and I poled the schooner into motion, while the girl shook the jib loose. Craig says that as we began to gain headway, he saw shadows slipping toward us under the trees. I don't know.

At any rate we soon felt the land breeze tugging at the loosened jib, and ran it up, while the girl took the wheel. The foresail followed, and Helen Carnie steered us out of the cove, away from the cursed region of the *malemba* lakes and the shores of Vata Lavum. Never, as I hope, to return.

Only once in the years that followed did I have the nerve to ask Bernard Craig what he had seen behind the mask of Brocky Tom. It was when he and Helen Carnie were on the deck of a Brisbane schooner that was to take them on the first leg of their voyage to Australia and England, and a Christian church.

Craig did not answer my question for some time. Then—

"It looked as if his soul had died," he said.

But I don't think that a man who died as Brocky Tom died could have lost his soul. No, I don't think so. And Helen Carnie agrees with me.

PLAY THE GAME

BY GEORGE IRVING BUSHFIELD

(Dedicated to Howard Blagbro, 11th Railway Engineers, Co. C.)

PLAY up, boy, play up!
What though you're black and blue?
A mother's kiss is worth all this.
Play the game, boy, play it through!

Play up, son, play up!
What though the fight be long?
The old school's in and she's bound to win.
Play the game, son, play it strong!

Play up, lad, play up!
What though you're treated mean?
The knocks in life are all in the strife.
Play the game, lad, play it clean!

Play up, pal, play up!
What though you pass through the gate?
To go out like a king is the only thing.
Play the game, pal, play it straight!

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A FREE-TO-ALL MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS, AND ADVENTURERS

NONE of us wants to help the Germans. One way of helping them is to buy German-made goods. Even after the war there will probably be need of putting a ban on German products. The American Defense Society, 44 East 23rd Street, New York, which has been doing splendid patriotic work since long before we entered the war, has taken up this matter and is circulating pledges whereby individuals bind themselves never to buy anything made in Germany.

Of course, if some day the German people throw off the Junker yoke, leave out the Hohenzollerns, change themselves back from beasts to humans and do a few other little things like that, it would be time to reconsider or cancel that pledge. But it will be long years before the Germans can prove themselves humans again.

AND here's another phase, suggested in a letter from one of you:

As one of the old one-idead type I am boxing around to secure the feeling of comfort and mutual support gained in an organized crowd in view of cutting out all trade with Germany and with the many German sympathizers we have with us. When you start such a ball rolling, list me.

I told this comrade about the American Defense Society's work and I judge he's registered with them by this time. They're good people to get in touch with anyhow, for their patriotic work is of a varied nature and may offer you other opportunities you'd welcome.

A BRIEF word from H. A. Lamb on his story in this issue:

New York.

The lakes in extinct volcanic craters are found in several of the South Sea islands. The island in question is located northeast of Santo, in the New Hebrides group, near Ambrym, which was the "Island of Changing Shapes." You won't find the name Vata Lavum in any chart, because I christened it that.—HAROLD A. LAMB.

THE article on firearms by D. Wiggins and L. R. Brown at one of our August Camp-Fires is bringing in answers and queries and arguments, just as we were sure it would do and wanted it to do. Here, for example, is a query from Comrade W. C. Tuttle of our writers' brigade, who has an old gun he wants identified.

Spokane, Washington.

Was greatly interested in that article "Firearms, Old and New," and would like to rise up and inquire if somebody would tell me something about a gun which I own.

Digging through the rust on the barrel I find the inscription: "Savage R. F. A. Middletown, Ct., H. S. North, Pat. 1856."

THE gun is about fifteen inches long and I think it is a .38 caliber. It is a muzzle-loading revolver, with an extra high hammer, which cuts off the rear sight unless cocked. Six-shooter. It has a peculiar shaped butt, but which fits the hand in good shape.

The novel feature is in the action. Instead of having the cylinder turn from the trigger-pull, there is another trigger, or lever, if you please, behind the pull-trigger, with a ring to fit the second finger. You turn the cylinder with your second finger and pull with the index finger—and pray, I reckon. It will weigh about four pounds.

The man I got it from claims it was picked up in

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Mexico. It has seen a lot of hard usage. My dad, who is an old gun-man, and who knows a lot about old guns, told me that it was a new one on him. As far as I can see—awful rusty—the rifles run straight down the barrel. Would like mighty well to have somebody tell me something about this style and make of gun, 'cause it looks like a killer.—W. C. TUTTLE.

THE other day I got word from Octavus Roy Cohen, one of whose stories appears in this issue, that he had successfully passed the preliminary examinations for a commission in the Signal Corps. He writes: "This is the first real chance for service which has come my way; and it is my sixteenth application." Sixteen attempts would seem to indicate sort of a desire to get to the front.

IT WILL be good news to you that his tale in this number is only the first of a series that Talbot Mundy is writing for us. Time was when he turned out his stories briskly and in large number, and you liked them better than any others of our tales. Nowadays he works more slowly and though his stories come at longer intervals I think you'll find them even more worth waiting for.

Here is a word to you from him. In it he fails to mention that many of at least the minor incidents are bits out of his own life. For example, the landing at Lourenço Marques.

New York.

This, and the stories that will follow, are all more or less reminiscent. The names of people have been so entirely changed that the originals are unrecognizable, except that the man Charles du Maurier under his real name made such a reputation on that countryside as to be undisguisable anyhow. Any one who lived in Lourenço Marques in the bad old days of monarchical government would need no spirit of divination to help him identify the original of du Maurier and his family, even if I had called him Jones.

AS FOR the Portuguese and their government of those days, there is this to be said for them: they were human. Murder was frequent, "justice" was purchasable and not to be had by any other means unless a man took law into his own hands—as he very well could do, if man enough, at almost any point thirty miles back from the sea. Where the coconut trees ceased from bearing fruit there ceased all but the shadow of the King of Portugal's authority. But the Portuguese, unofficial and official, were hospitable folk, as far as I was able to observe and quite devoid of the Spanish element of cruelty, very often brave, and frequently generous. They were frankly ashamed of their own misgovernment and ready at any time to talk of a republic with any one, but in almost every instance unwilling, or unable, to forego the chance of looting while the chance remained.

Of course this utter corruption of their government attracted to Lourenço Marques and the other towns (such as Inhambane, Beira and so on) all the undesirables from British territory and not a few from Madagascar; and their crimes were naturally credited to the Portuguese. That was not so unjust after all, for it was the Portuguese who made the rascality possible and whose highest officials set the worst example in the first place.

THERE were two or three peculiarities I especially noticed that are worth preserving from oblivion; and there is one conjecture I would like to offer. They were much more capable of deliberate cruelty toward a white man than a black. It is true that they were guilty of the most atrocious conduct toward natives, but they fed them, whereas they would let a white man starve (and frequently did) without compunction. They recruited slave-gangs on the East Coast for the West, and *vice versa*, and the cruelty inflicted on the "laborers" is best unwritten. Yet the Portuguese themselves were often the severest critics of the system and the guilty officials responsible for its continuance were a minority held in unqualified contempt. They did not permit flogging of natives by planters and private citizens.

The lower-class Portuguese invariably loathed the English. The better class invariably liked them. (I found the exact contrary to be the case in German territory.) The reason, I suppose, was that the riffraff of the population and the corrupt officials came in contact almost exclusively with blackguard Englishmen, as corrupt, as greedy and degraded as themselves; whereas the Portuguese gentlemen met English gentlemen and discovered ideas in common. Unhappily, the gentlemen of either race were rare in that afflicted land.

MY CONJECTURE is that the reason why the Portuguese find themselves fighting on the side of the Allies in this war is that the Portuguese, as a nation, were conscious of the shortcomings of their government and had not a good word to say for it. The German people, of course, have endorsed every action of their government; the more scoundrelly the atrocity, the louder their paeans of praise. Whereas I never once heard a Portuguese—not even a Portuguese official—praise his government. They denounced it first, last and all the time; and, although they took advantage of it with almost unbelievable cynicism, when their chance came at last they overthrew it. They were human. They did not care ten *reis* for efficiency without humanity, and they made no pretense at all to be supermen or demigods.

A LETTER from E. A. Brininstool, indefatigable gatherer of data and souvenirs of the old West:

Los Angeles, California.

I was in Santa Fé. New Mexico, two days last week, running down an old-time photo of Billy the Kid. It required time and some chasing, but I have it. I had the photo rephotoed and have the negative—the only picture that was ever made of this notorious cuss of but twenty-one years.

I also met and heard from his own lips, the story

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of the capture of the Kid, from Don Romulo Martinez, who was sheriff of Santa Fé County when the Kid was captured the first time, and who delivered him to the authorities at Las Cruces, by whom he was sentenced to be hung, but dug out of jail a few nights later, being shot and killed by Pat Garrett soon after, as recorded in my story. Believe me—that old town has some lively stories. The Don told me many things about the Kid never put in print. . . . If you want to add this picture of the Kid to the others, I will send you a print. It is a rare picture, as it is the only one the Kid ever allowed to be made.—E. A. BRININSTOOL.

I WISH that some great voice could boom out across the distances and speak a certain message into the hearts of all our soldiers and sailors who are fighting our country's battles. Some of them already have the message. I know, for they have told me of it. Giving their all now, yet they are planning further giving in the future. Fighting for the protection of things held dear, they still have time and thought to plan how, when war is over, they can help make these prized things even more worth fighting for.

THESE millions of fighters will come back to us, after victory. Back to what they have fought to maintain. But they will come back with keener insight, with a new understanding of other things than war. They will ask "What is this we have fought for? Our comrades died for it. Is it fully worthy of all the blood and tears that have been shed in saving it? We have paid out the farthest price and what we have paid for must be worth that price. If it is not so strong and clean and good as it can be made, then it must be made so. It must be made worthy of its price. And *we* bore the brunt of the payment. We have become the doers and the makers. If others have not made democracy and our country as clean and good as they should be, then we will take up this new fight so that our other fight may not be in vain. We are a mighty force. What we will to do we can do. We can fight in peace as well as in war. We will go on in our fight for the best in democracy."

SOLDIERS and sailors, if you have not heard the message, hear it now. If you have not seen the need, see it now.

In the little book, "To Americans," issued free to all by the American League for Citizenship, Inc., there is this same message to our fighters, an appeal that the League knows will be answered:

The League makes supreme appeal to the soldiers, sailors, marines and non-combatants now upholding in war the American people's honor and safety. They will return to us with new vision and with a more living understanding of the needs of democracy. That for which they have offered their lives and suffering will have become to them something to be more treasured, something made more peculiarly their own, something to be made more worthy of their sacrifice. In the hands of these millions of voting citizens will largely lie the future of American democracy. To them the League offers itself as their instrument in the building of a better America. And upon them the League relies for cleared eyes to see real needs, for strength to enforce cleanness and for true understanding of the need of common cause for the common good.

LAST year our readers selected by vote the best ten stories published in *Adventure* during 1918. We want our readers to have as much say as possible in making the magazine, and this annual vote not only helps decidedly in choosing the writers and kinds of story *Adventure's* readers most want but also gives every last one of you a chance to say his say in the making of the magazine and to have his say count.

It isn't just a question of learning which writers and stories are best liked by you. Nearly all our writers receive at least some votes and the general result is a long graded list tapering from thousands of points each down to several or even, in a few cases, none at all. The editors learn something about which stories were *not* popular as well as about the preferred ones.

VOTING is simple and easy. On any sheet of paper write your list of ten stories (giving author's names), numbering them in order of preference. If you like, add as many as ten more stories by way of second choice or complimentary mention. Add your name and address. That's all.

Any one can vote provided he has read at least *seven* of the issues, for 1918 (First January, 1918, to Mid-December, 1918, inclusive). Serials, novels, novelettes, short stories, and articles all rank alike and may be voted for. Poems and "Camp-Fire" are barred.

A serial that laps over into 1917 or 1919 may also be included in the vote. The same author may appear in the list as many times as you please. No votes will be counted if they reach us later than December 31, 1918, though allowance will be

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made for those writing from long distances, particularly the war-front. A list of the winners will be published in a subsequent issue, as was done last year.

If you've not already begun marking down your favorite stories, better begin doing so now. Don't let stories in the later issues overshadow those earlier in the year merely because you read the former later and have them more vividly in your mind. And don't let the mere length of a serial, novel or novelette outweigh the value of the shorter stories.

AND this year let's add a new feature to our voting. As in past years, we're leaving "Camp-Fire" and other departments out of the regular vote. But wouldn't it be interesting to find out just what relative values are assigned to these departments by our readers in general? Suppose that, in addition to the regular vote, we add a special vote. Call the total value of an average issue one hundred per cent., including both fiction and departments; then write down after each of the following items the proportion of value each of them seems to you to deserve:

Stories (all together)
Poetry (all together)
Camp-Fire
Identification Cards
Fighting the Hun Web
Looking Ahead
Ask Adventure
How to Help Win the War
Lost Trails

The total for the list should, of course, be one hundred per cent.

Of course, "Fighting the Hun Web" and "Looking Ahead" are not really under way yet, since there has not been time for replies from readers in response to the first appearance of these departments to be received, put into type and be published in the magazine. So perhaps in these two cases we'd better make some allowance and try to value them according to what they will be when really going.

I HOPE by this time I don't need to tell you that the staff is always wide open to suggestions of any kind for making our magazine better.

If there's anything you want to suggest or criticize, add it at the end of your vote.

SOME interesting bits from "Uncle Frank" H. Huston on Gila monsters, rattlers, the king of all Western pioneers, Calamity Jane, and the pronunciation of "God." The last is in reply to a comrade at a former Camp-Fire. And the rest of you who knew the West of the old days, what can you tell us about Major North?

Camp 5, North of Marysville, California.

Comrade—of Prescott should be told once more that "God" is pronounced like "hod" in "coalhod" when done by linguists, but ordinary geezers drawl it like a darky, but never with an "*r*," *i. e.*, "gord." English lends itself poorly to phonetics, you know that, but resuming, I strongly suspect threshing this out with "Prescott" some two years since. Again, whites say "Návajo," accent on "nav," but Greasers say "Navájo," accent on "va" as per academic Castellano; as to spelling, either is correct, but j is original Spanish form.

GILA monster will vary in localities slightly, as does the rattler. I've seen 'em with dominant color now reddish, again yellow, again brownish, again clayish and, on very large ones, like a beaded moccasin. Natural History Museum, Washington, D. C., used to have some fine "specemints" of latter. Trouble is lots of tenderfeet, or near "sandfleas," see a chuckwalla and think it's a Gila. In the 80's I saw two separate men bitten by 'em in "Prescott's" own town and both died of lockjaw, and, by the way, Prescott a few years since had more "skippers" and "bobtails" than all the rest of the United States combined. That's one reason Miles said he would see "grass grow in its streets yet."

THAT little inquiry of mine *re* old-timers sure started 'em, but, with all the wealth of information sent in, not one word of the king of 'em all—Major North. Come on now, some one, and give us the saga of the chief of chiefs.

NOW I can not go into this very deeply for personal reasons, but I've seen and talked with Calamity Jane, the real original one (several tried to palm themselves off as her). I remember her, but right here, understand, it is only memory dimmed and obscured by time, not facts.

Jane had many stories told of her, one that her husband and family were killed by Injuns and that she smelled trouble ahead and never showed up except as a prophet of evil to come, hence name Calamity. Again that she'd had so much trouble that the name was appropriate to her. She was a tall gaunt pioneer woman. Pike County, I think, but am not sure. Rode, talked and acted like many others of her kind—I've seen 'em even today—but she never was the hell-roaring roisterer she is credited with being. She was in Ft. Sidney, Nebraska, one time, "across the track" (the shacks opposite the Post), and bawled a young chap out as a "—— —— rennygate," which he was to an extent but not wholly so. If I remember she had tried ranching and been put out of business so often that she gave it up. I never heard a word or whisper against her morality (chastity) but one look at her was enough to account for that and I think she had a "way house," sort of tavern and with her usual luck lost out on it by a raid and flames.—"H."

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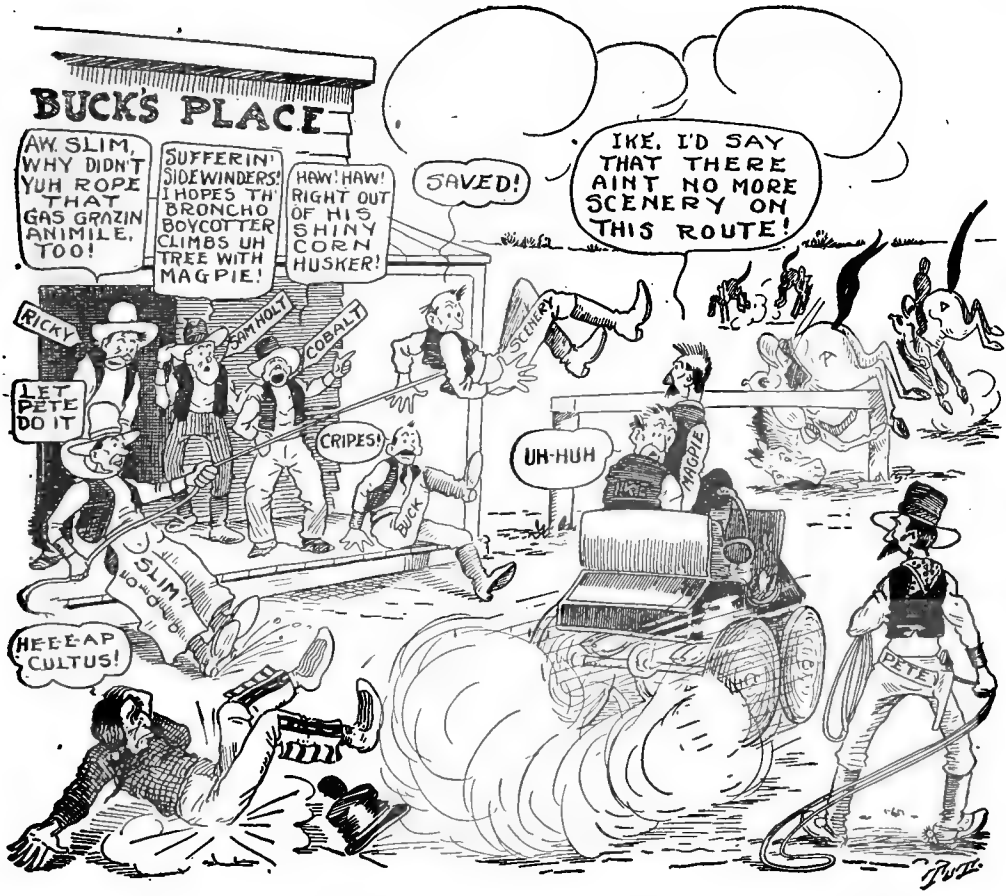

Illustration by Mr. Tuttle, the cartoonist, for the story by Mr. Tuttle, the writer—"The Hand of Providence," in a recent issue

OF THE last four stories, including the one in this issue, by S. B. H. Hurst, three have been "flotsam" stories, tales of drifters, of human wreckage, in the world's far corners. As our old-timers will remember, Mr. Hurst has covered most of this round ball we live on and in the years it is only natural that he should have met many and many a bit of human flotsam. Out of these meetings he has built the tales he is now giving us.

Here is his own statement of the case:

Seattle, Washington.

You find them at the far corners of the world, these men who do not speak of yesterday; a devil driving each of them from a past out of which faces stare inhumanly, as through smoke. But they do not linger, and respectable squaw-men do not seek their acquaintance and would be more likely to be polite to their women than to ask them their business.

But they have, of course, come from somewhere, and of that *somewhere*, as well as of *something*, they breathe in patches when breath is coming hard.

Out into the air of strange places their whispers go, as if to break trail for the souls that will shortly follow them. Their eyes look you a last "so long," and you ease the weight from your arms—and wonder. And being yourself kin to them you understand much that the whispers failed to tell you. And you hope the ground is not frozen as hard as it appears to be, for you dislike working with a pick.

It having been my fate to have nine such bits of drift die in my arms, I have a patchwork of their history—scraps torn from each of the nine. I have taken time and made me a crazy quilt of them. But it is more seemly—or, at any rate, I think so—to show it to you bit by bit.—S. B. H. HURST.

IT IS said that a main reason for desertions from our Army and Navy before the war was plain homesickness. At the outset of the war in April, 1917, War Camp Community Service was brought into being

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by the War and Navy Departments' Commission on Training Camp Activities to attend to all the wants and needs of our soldiers, sailors and marines while they are on leave outside of camp—at the time when they get lonely and homesick. The consequent reduction in the number of desertions was amazing.

This service has an organizer in every community near a training-camp, cantonment or naval station, ready to provide anything possible from a baby to play with to a nice girl to talk to or dance with or an inexpensive room for a mother, wife, sister, sweetheart or the man himself. If you're in Army or Navy, look him up to get the service; if you're not, help furnish it.

FROM one of our comrades who belongs to both our readers' and our writers' brigades, Samuel Edward Harris, comes to the Camp-Fire the following shark story:

Key West.

A few minutes before, I had caught a whipperee measuring 4 feet 8 inches, when the shark ran off with my line and I exclaimed, "This is another, boys!" Before I tell about the shark it may be well to explain just what a whipperee is (I don't know its technical name).

THE whipperee resembles the skate, which is frequently the pest of anglers in New York waters. But there's this difference between the fish: the skate is harmless, while the whipperee is feared more than sharks by native swimmers in Key West. The whipperee's tail is not only longer than a skate's, but is composed of a substance that looks like a strip of dried cowhide. According to persons who have been swiped by a whipperee's tail, it's like coming into contact with a live wire. Years ago I saw a Cuban's leg which had been cut by a whipperee, and it had a ridge, colored like indigo and as big as one's little finger, half way round it. As some Italians and others in New York eat the wings of a skate, so some Cubans and others in Key West eat the wings of a whipperee. It is said the wings, made up into a salad, taste like crabmeat.

TO GET back to the shark: Sammy Thompson, Albert Sanchez and I were out in the motor-boat *Trio*, fishing in Mangrove Key Channel, a mile offshore. The tide was running out, and snappers and yellow grunts, for which we were fishing, were not biting well. I was using a hand-line (grunt-line, it is called here), which was about the size of a drop-line used to catch fluke and flounder in New York waters. After I had caught, killed and measured the whipperee I baited my hook and threw it out again. A few minutes later I had a bite and hooked the fish, though I didn't succeed in turning it. It was then I exclaimed to Thompson and Sanchez that I had another whipperee.

My line was 180 feet long, with a white grunt hook (about the size of a fluke hook) fastened to the line with a brass wire leader. In ten seconds or so most of my line had sung through my hands and I added to my first exclamation, "This is a whopdoodle! Cube (meaning Sanchez), tie your line to mine." His line was the same length as mine.

IN THE meantime I had jumped up on the stern-sheet and was gradually inscreasing the pressure on the line, but still the shark (we didn't know it was a shark until ten or fifteen minutes later) kept heading out to sea. A few seconds later the Cube cried out:

"It's nearly all out, Sam! Hold her tight, and let him pop it! That's the only way you'll save any of it."

I held the line as tightly as I could and brought the shark up. But that was only the beginning of the fight. I had pulled in less than a hundred feet of the line when the shark turned and headed out to sea again. And again I stopped him (we refer to all fish down here in the masculine) at the critical moment, and again, after he had come my way for a few seconds he turned out to sea. We had gone through that procedure for ten or fifteen minutes, when Thompson shouted, "Look! It's a shark!" We looked to where he pointed and saw the monster's dorsal fin cutting through the surface of the water.

I FOUGHT that shark for thirty or forty minutes (the Cube said it was more than an hour), and by that time he was more fagged out than a Marathon runner on the home-stretch. I could guide him to whatever place I wished. Several times he was at the side of the boat, but a few feet away, and that was how we judged he was at least nine feet long, for he seemed to me half as long as the boat, the length of which is 19 feet, 4 inches. Finally I got him up to the stern of the boat, his head but a foot away from the rudder, and we took a good look at him. He was then as docile as a pet rabbit.

He was mossy with age and the color of deeply tarnished copper. Six or eight remoras were stuck to him, and occasionally one of them left him, swam away a few feet and returned to him.

IN THE final stages of the fight a dingey, with four men in her, hove into sight about the easterly end of Mangrove Key, and Sanchez called to the men to come to him. When they got within talking distance he explained that we had a big shark hooked and asked if they had a large hook or a harpoon aboard. They had a shark hook, and one of them crawled up in the bow of the dingey with the hook in his hand, but when he saw the shark he yelled to the sculler to pull the dingey about. The man with the hook said he wasn't going to take a chance in a dingey with "that brute." Instead he stepped out of the dingey on the house of the motor-boat, intending to go to the stern-sheet to try to get the hook into the shark's mouth. The man was walking aft, when the shark, exhausted, turned over on his back and, in doing so, put a kink in my wire and broke it. We watched him drift off like a soggy log.

It was not until the excitement died down that I realized how severely my hands were cut. The skin had been rubbed off my right forefinger in two or three places, and the remainder of my fingers and the upper parts of my palms, particularly of my right hand, were crisscrossed with traces of the line, some of which had cut through to the flesh.

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THE case of the Y. M. C. A. is a very simple one. It is all set forth in the following statements from American headquarters in France. In a letter to General Pershing, Lieutenant-Colonel E. S. Wheeler said:

Give me nine hundred men who have a Y.M.C.A. rather than one thousand who have none, and I will have better fighters every time.

General Pershing directed that Colonel Wheeler's letter be sent to the Y. M. C. A. officials, and himself added this comment:

The conclusions and opinions of Lieutenant-Colonel Wheeler are concurred in by these headquarters.

It's a very simple case. Here is something that increases the fighting effectiveness of our forces in France by more than eleven per cent. On the basis set by General Pershing the Y. M. C. A. ought to receive one-ninth as much personal and financial support as is given to the entire American Army, for to every nine men it adds one more.

Modern warfare recognizes the tremendous importance of maintaining health in armies and of maintaining good mental condition as a requisite of good health. The extreme importance of morale, a thing less tangible, is also recognized, though as yet it still lacks the full and systematic attention it should receive. The Y. M. C. A. builds up all these things—health, good mental condition, morale. That is why it makes every nine American soldiers equal to ten without it.

Being a good and loyal American, what else can you do than support the Y. M. C. A. to the fullest of your ability?

HERE'S an interesting contribution to our discussions on ants and ant battles from a comrade in Indiana:

Logansport, Indiana.

If you are not already fed up on stories of ant battles I could tell a story of a most prodigious battle which was waged between two parties or rather armies of ants, apparently of the same species, but rival colonies. The field of battle was the portico of the old State House at Indianapolis, in the year 1863, when I was a small boy.

HOSTILITIES were in full swing when I appeared on the scene early in the morning, and I immediately became interested and saw to it that the little fighters had the field to themselves, persuading people not to tramp on them. This benevolent occupation kept me busy all day, for I wished to see the end of the fight.

The combatants were large black ants, about one-half inch long. Wending their way through the mêlée were parties of laborers, distinguished by their smaller heads and mandibles, bearing away a lot of white eggs, which seemed to be the cause of the fight. They worked steadily and, unless nipped by some fighter, seemed not at all interested in anything but their duty of bearing away the eggs to a place of safety, which in this case was a patch of burdock, where they stored the eggs temporarily, while another party, working on the ground, took them to their storehouses.

THE big-headed soldiers ravaged about the field, accosting every ant they met, ant-fashion, coming to a clinch without ceremony if the one they met was an enemy. They always aimed for a hold at the junction of thorax and abdomen, though a neck hold or even a good grip on a leg was good enough. If the hold was good the enemy was cut in two. If it was bad, the enemy at once got his hold, and neither let go till one or both was dead. Once in a while there was a perfect Donnybrook fight with a half-dozen or more in a hopeless tangle. It was very business-like, indeed, as the survivor invariably sought another enemy.

Toward evening, when the forces were nearly exhausted and only about one-fourth of the fighters were alive, another phase of the battle appeared. The eggs had disappeared and the laborers were again on the scene to look after the dead. It was evidently a perfectly organized effort to dispose of the dead, as the workers picked up the corpses and dropped them to the nearest step below, and others would pass them to the next and so on till the dead were neatly piled under some weeds. Another party, apparently soldiers, went about the field making sure that none of the maimed survived, and I could not see that they made any distinction between their wounded and the enemy's wounded. The ant is a practical fellow, like the German, and a wounded ant had no place in their economy.

ONE feature of the combat which I did not understand at the time was the offensive odor noticeable in the immediate vicinity of the fight. I have since learned that this odor is formic acid, which ants are said to discharge when angry or fighting. So the Huns are not the first to use gas in warfare.

I stayed on the field of battle till nightfall and left on account of the demands of hunger. Next morning not a dead ant was to be seen, and the pile under the weeds had disappeared, I know not where. The janitor declared that he had not yet swept the portico and steps, so it is likely that the ants did a good job of cleaning up.

The affair seemed to me so very interesting that I made it the subject of a "composition" which was read in school, thereby earning myself the nickname of "bugs," which stuck to me ever after. Some of my old schoolboy friends who survive in Indianapolis still use the name in preference to my lawful name and title.—NELSON W. CADY, M.D.

WE HAVEN'T heard from our old comrade A. D. Temple, of Piedras Negras, Mexico, for quite some time, though he and I get into touch every little while.

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Here's the good word from him, written a year or so ago. Also he tells of a sample of the many former German-Americans who are now all Americans and as loyal as our best.

Saludes. Considering that I'm in Mexico, it is shockingly dull from a news-letter point of view. Nothing doing in the way of shooting and killing except way down south, where the bandits did blow up a train, kill a few of the train crew and passengers, rob all hands and carry off two señoritas to an unknown but easily imagined fate. Here they only do by retail what our friends the *boches*, thanks to their much praised efficiency, do by wholesale.

IN AUGUST I had three boy friends that had answered the call to arms against the Huns. Now I've only two. One—I never met him face to face, but we knew each other by letter and he was a family friend—died on August 15th as gloriously as a soldier can. He was a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, advanced step by step through two years' fighting on the Western Front, and only a kid, not yet twenty-one. He was "up" for a military Medal on his colonel's recommendation for having successfully commanded a wire-cutting expedition and returned without the loss of a man.

He was home on furlough in July and saw some of our boys in London and liked their looks to no end, as fighting men. On August 8th he wrote to America from the trenches: "I was wounded today, but not badly enough to go to the rear; am still on duty." On August 15th they had driven the *boches* back and were advancing the battery to retain the ground already won, when a German shell struck an ammunition dump, exploding it, and Philip Sydney Marshall of Birmingham, England, finished his "bit" for England, America, France and humanity and joined the ranks of the thousands of young heroes that had gone before him. That name, "Philip Sydney" fitted him mighty well, I think.

GEORGE and Rob are still left me. They were my comrades on many a shooting and fishing trip; and I will say for George that he was about the poorest fisherman that I ever saw; but by ——! he could shoot all right, like most of the boys raised on the frontier. He is a high-school and college graduate. I saw his "old man" yesterday in Eagle Pass, mailing him the local paper, to France, where he is a captain in the —— Infantry, U. S. A. He is an expert on bayonet drill and has a marksman's badge. How these kids grow up and sprout whiskers before one realizes it. His mother says she's sorry she hasn't another boy to send to the front; that's the kind of a woman she is—no pacifist about her.

And there is Rob. He is only nineteen and just out of high-school. His mother, a pure-blooded German and a sympathizer with the German cause at the *beginning* of the struggle, and many a fierce argument did Rob and I have over it, as my blood forced me to be strongly pro-Ally.

BUT the U-boats and the Northern France and Belgian atrocities changed their sympathies; when the country called for naval volunteers, his mother sent Bob proudly and promptly, to answer the call and now he is aboard the U. S. S. ——. He was brought up most of his life in Mexico, speaks the language like a native, and is used to war's alarms. When a young Mexican captain arrested him some years ago during the first years of the revolution because he was hunting rabbits with a rifle and had no permit to carry arms, he not only retained the rifle that was in danger of confiscation, but seduced the captain to going rabbit hunting with him, and beat him shooting at that!

In 1913 Rob and I went on a hunting and fishing trip without asking permission of the military authorities, and ran into a hornets' nest when a company of what we supposed were cowpunchers gathering up the horse bunch unexpectedly dropped their .30-30s and Colts on us and suggested pleasantly that we turn over our guns to them for the benefit of *La Patria*. We turned them over, of course. Logic ain't in it with a .30-30 aimed at your bean, for facilitating quick and correct action in an emergency. They got my pet deer rifle and the old six-shooter that had traveled all over Mexico with me, and Rob's 16-gage shotgun. He took it all as coolly as if it wasn't the first time he had a gun thrown down on him, and seemed to rather look on the humorous side of the incident, after we were permitted to retire with only our fishing-rods.

He wrote to me that he had been half way to France convoying transports with troops and Red Cross nurses aboard and in mid-ocean was met by destroyers from the other side, to whom they delivered their charges and returned, being out of sight of land for eighteen days and encountering a rather severe storm on their return voyage.

He says the "eats" are good and he likes the life. If he is not submarined and sent to Davy Jones before his time that kid is going to make his mark, I believe. He has the stuff they make *men* of in him.

TO CHANGE the subject, I had venison steak for dinner, and very tough it was, but a luxury you New Yorkers don't get very often. It was from a superb ten-point buck that a friend killed a few miles from town yesterday. It was a fine trophy but deucedly tough eating. Three weeks ago I had antelope steak, which is a rare meat, even here, although antelope abound on the plains near here, and of late they have run a number of them down in automobiles and shot them at short range.

It is quite an adventure to chase antelope over a prairie with no roads and full of badger-holes at sixty or forty miles an hour until the animals slack up their gait and come within range; if anything breaks something is going to happen, and *pronto*. I wonder if some of those speed maniacs that enjoy runnning over babies and old women would like to come down here and try it.—A. D. TEMPLE.

WHEN peace comes it must be no compromise peace. It must mean the end of Germany as a maker of wars. And Germany will be a maker of wars until it *can't* make wars. Let the snake live on the chance it may reform. But pull its fangs.—ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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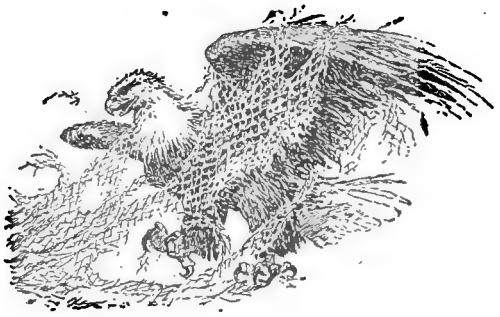
FIGHTING THE HUN WEB



A department devoted to throwing light upon the actual workings of the subtle German propaganda in the United States, Canada and the other Allied countries. Every time you discover one of the strands of this web, tell the rest of us about it, briefly but clearly. Once seen, it loses its dangerous power.

EDITORIAL NOTE: *Until there has been time to receive and print items from our readers the work will be carried on by items from the staff and their personal friends together with such warnings as come in spontaneously even before this department has made its first appearance.*

SEASON with a grain of salt any dispatches from neutral countries which palliate German crimes. Here's the way Heinie works it:

1. He—for instance—sinks a hospital ship.
2. A subsidized paper—Swedish, for instance—upholds the crime.
3. The German papers reprint the article as representing the opinion of the Swedish public—of course, adding a blast of their own.
4. American correspondents in Amsterdam or Zurich find the despatch when the German papers seep through the lines.
5. They cable the story to the United States.
6. The American Committee on Public Information spends several weeks in unraveling the truth, and several more in setting the public right.
7. Meantime Swedish minds over here are poisoned and the correction goes by the board, because
8. Heinie has sunk another hospital ship, and
9. See 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

And that—I have it on the word of an experienced newspaper man who's in the know—is the way the citizens from neutral countries living in the United States are bedeviled by "news" "quoted" from homeland papers.—MATTHEW CARROLL, Yonkers, N. Y.

"MORE men are being killed and injured in the construction of ships than in the trenches in France." A lie. A Hun lie, and a very silly one. But it finds believers or leaves a doubt. The facts prove it ridiculous and the papers have published the facts along with the rumor they prove a lie. The accident rate is less than one-third as high as the pre-war rate as shown in the statistics of the Bureau of Labor. But a lie travels fast and the disproof can not follow all its footsteps. The Hun knows this and counts on the net profit. Our job is to cut down that net profit.—JENNINGS BLACK, New York.

WHEN you hear some one say this is a "rich man's war," look out. Also, size up the speaker carefully. Maybe he's merely a dupe. Maybe not. In any case what he says is beautiful German propaganda. Their favorite kind—sowing dissension in the ranks of us, their enemies. It's this kind of "rich man's war":—however it started, it's a war against brutishness and autocracy. And the kind of war that, if Germany won it, would sooner or later bring Germany over here trying to give us what she gave the Belgians and Serbians. I don't notice that the working classes of Belgium and Serbia have been having a pleasant time.

Theories are just theories. The facts are that this war is, essentially, a war of self-preservation. Theorize all you please, but *here's the war*, and if we don't win it there'll be some more facts to face, horrible facts that no amount of theorizing can theorize away. Theorize, if you have to, but don't theorize in a way that will hinder our winning the war. If you believe this country is run by a plutocracy, the time to adjust matters is *after* the war. And it will *not* adjust them to spread ideas that help the Germans in their attempt to force something worse upon us.—A. S. H.

THE war has made a lot of things scarce and high-priced, no two ways about that; but other things are scarce and high-priced, not on account of the war but on account of Hun propaganda activities. My grocer told me that right here in New York there's enough of one staple food to supply the whole country for months; but it's being rationed severely so that German money can't buy it all up, hoard or destroy it, and thus create an artificial shortage. What d'ye know about that?—ALLEN LATHROP, New York.

IN SOME American cities German is taught in the public schools. And the cities supply the text-books. And the text-books, or many of them, were written "to promote a friendly feeling between 'Amerika' and the mighty German Empire." (Ahem! Polite way of beating the propaganda devil around the American post.) So our school-children read that "the German nation is a federal

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union of soverign States, like the U. S. A., and the Kaiser is the head of the German nation, just as the President is the head of this country;" that "the Bundesrath compares with our Senate, and the Reichstag corresponds to the House of Representatives," etc.

Very glib; and a —— lie. Only we don't know it's a lie till we're told, and the Heinie text-books *don't tell.*

Pretty smooth work, getting America to finance enemy propaganda among the soldiers and mothers of the next decade; *nicht wahr?*—F. K. NOYES.

EVERY time some one starts on "Irish freedom" and "Irish wrongs" and makes a *present* issue of it, be sure the Hun, perhaps unknown to the talker, pulls the strings somewhere in the background. The Hun wants to make all the trouble he can for England (and, therefore for America, whose fate is linked with England's in this war), and disaffection and rebellion in Ireland are good means of doing it.

See the thing clearly. It isn't a question of whether Ireland is right or wrong. It's a question of whether now is a fair time and a *sensible* time for Ireland to make the issue. God help her if she got "free" with German help—and therefore under German supervision. Free like the Belgians or a dozen others of the peoples living unwillingly under German or Austrian yoke.

It's like two men stopping in a burning house to settle a personal argument.

And any American citizen, of Irish or any other blood, who takes up Ireland's cause, however just, against one of our Allies is a traitor to the United States. An American's job is to fight *America's* battles, not Ireland's.

But of course the Hun wants him to devote as much time as possible to Ireland's battles instead of to America's. Therefore the Hun misses no chance to interest Americans in Ireland's cause. The Hun doesn't do this for Ireland. He does it for Germany.

You can't be an Irishman and an American at the same time, any more than you can be a German and an American at the same time. Or an Italian, Frenchman, Hungarian or any other. An American is an American *and nothing else.* If he isn't, take away his American citizenship.—A. S. H.

LOOKING AHEAD

"Win the War but Get Ready for Peace"

No matter how long the war lasts it is our first duty during that time to work unrelentingly for victory. But we have a second duty. In peace we failed to prepare for war. In war we must not fail to prepare for peace.

To help in meeting this second duty while we are meeting the first, *Adventure* has instituted this department. Its main purpose is to direct our readers' attention more definitely to the many problems America will face when peace comes and to offer an open forum for exchange of views.

In order to hear from as many as possible each expression of opinion must be limited to *not more than one hundred and fifty words at most.* Merely state the problem that, to you, seems most urgent, adding briefly if you like, your idea of the right solution. The department's value lies in the opinions taken as a whole, not in any one of them.

"Looking Ahead" is not a place for editorial opinion. It is a forum for the opinions of as many as possible; its office is to seek the consensus of those opinions as a guide and stimulus to all. The editors will do their honest best to make the selection for publication as closely as possible indicative of the proportionate importance given the various problems and suggestions by the Americans of all classes and conditions who read our magazine.

It is up to you as an American to do your part. If you haven't thought about these things, think now. Then tell us what you think.

All contributions must be signed, with address given. Only initials will be printed if you insist, but the nation's problems are matters on which an American should not be afraid to speak over his own name.—A. S. H.

(Since a magazine is made up ahead, it will be several issues before there can be time to put into shape and give you the replies from readers in response to these first appearances of this Department. Send yours in now.)

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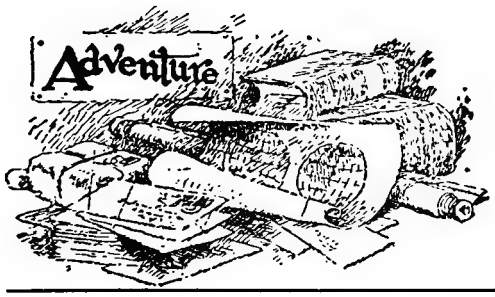

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Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelop accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For 25 cents we will send the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Postpaid. This is cost.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WANTED: September number of *Adventure* for 1914, issued August 5th, 1914. State post-paid price wanted.—Addresss HARRY C. BIBY, 1015 Citizens National Bank Building, Los Angeles, Cal.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp, at the Front or in Hospital.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

STEWART RODGERS, care of *Adventure.*

PVT. LEO A. WALL, care of *Adventure.*

No. 258453, SPR. C. C. CAMPBELL, Despatch Rider, Mechanical Transport Section, C. E. F., France.

CORPORAL P. J. GOULD, care of *Adventure.*

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1302 N. St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

American Defense Society, Inc.—An organization working systematically for real Americanism and furthering the winning of the war by watchfulness and effort at the right points.—Address 44 East 23d St., New York City.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelop is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 Thirty-third Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
(Editor to be appointed.) Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries. (Mr. Whiteaker, the former editor of this section, is now serving with our army in France. His section is accordingly in abeyance until we find a suitable successor.)

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, 5036 Utica Ave., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. Ry. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors, or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, Honolulu, T. H. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Nitro, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
(Editor to be appointed.) Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios. (Mr. Ritchie, the former editor of this section, is now in France. His section is accordingly in abeyance until we find a suitable successor.)

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 724 North Third St., Reading, Pa. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda, and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Building, Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

Away Down South in Dixie

IF, BEFORE buying land, the investor would go look at his prospective purchase, there would be millions more of happier homes, and hundreds of millions more money to be put into Liberty Bonds:

Question:—"I am writing you for information regarding Mississippi and Alabama. Is there a strip of land through Alabama or Mississippi known as the black belt where the soil is lots richer? Some claim they can raise one hundred bushels of corn per acre. I doubted that. Do they use fertilizers there to produce a good crop? Send me in full details—all about these two States.

"Do they have much trouble with the cotton-weevil there? What is the price of the best of land near town or market? Which is the best place to go to for good crops and good health?

"How hot does it get there? Is the colored labor they have there in either State desirable and give no trouble?

"Can they raise fruit there such as apples, peaches and small fruits such as berries?

"What kinds of game is there? Which part of either State and also which State is the best place for a man to locate in, a man with five thousand dollars to pay on whatever land he might buy? I saw your address in *Adventure*. P. S. ROUND, Hansen, Idaho.

P. S. Also state what is the best thing to invest in to be sure of an income from his investment. Please reply soon.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—In both Alabama and Mississippi there is all manner of land: black and rich; light and sandy, and with nothing under it tight enough to hold enrichment; swampy land to be reclaimed; swampy land that has been reclaimed, and must be drained continuously, and pine barrens that will grow nothing but scrubby pines. Except on the best land, they use a great deal of fertilizer. They have more or less trouble with the cotton-weevil, but they are fighting it all the time.

As to the prices of land, it varies; there is no set price anywhere. Good land comes high; they get all they can for it, according to its nearness to a town or a pike road. Poor land sells for low prices, just as it does anywhere else.

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As to what is the best section for good crops and good health, I hardly know what to tell you. There is nearly always more or less of malaria, especially for people who are unacclimated, where there is very rich land, because there are nearly always low places and dead water where there is very rich land.

With regard to the temperatures, I fancy it would get rather warm for you in these States in the Summer months. The mean July temperatures, according to Government reports, in the cities of Birmingham, Mobile, and Montgomery (these cities in Alabama) are 80, 80 and 81, respectively. The hottest ever reported in these cities is 104, 102 and 107, respectively. Annual rainfall is about 55 inches. Mississippi will average up about the same.

Colored labor (which is mighty scarce now) will give good service and little trouble if it is handled correctly, that is, with both firmness and kindness.

Yes, fruit is raised there, though apples do not give as much satisfaction to their growers as do peaches, plums, apricots, figs, etc. Particular attention is paid to scuppernong grapes, which are very fine grapes. There is a fine black grape, which sometimes grows wild, called a muscadine. Plenty of strawberries are grown. There are some wild berries of different kinds. All fruit trees, however, must have constant care to protect them from such diseases as San José scale, pin-worm, borers, etc.

I haven't given you very definite advice, because what I, a Southerner, would call good farming country and good climate might not be what you, a Westerner, would call good farming country and good climate. There is but one way for you to decide whether you wish to come to the South, and that is for you to visit the South and *see it for yourself;* and Summer-time is the time for you to make the visit, when you can see crops growing and feel of the hottest temperatures.

But if you are doing pretty well in Idaho, my candid and man-to-man advice is to stay in Idaho. If you are accustomed to that land and that climate, you would be certain to have more or less difficulty in a land and climate that are far different from those of the Northwest.

I'm pretty sure you would like Tennessee better, especially for the climate. Enclosed I am sending you clippings from a Knoxville, Tennessee, paper, advertising farms for sale. Knoxville is in eastern Tennessee. Of course, you would see any or all these farms before buying.

The African West Coast

GOING to tropical Africa, or tropical anywhere in fact, without money or a job staked out, is pretty risky business, as Talbot Mundy and many another adventurer can fervently testify:

Question:—"Are there any financial opportunities in or around the cities on the western coast of Africa? Are there any chances for a young fellow with a partial high-school education to make what you would call a decent living? What branches of labor are indulged in that would be fit for a white man to do?

"What would the fare from America cost? Where is the best port to sail from? Can you suggest a good outfit? Has civilization a strong foothold on that country?

"Please tell me something about their witchcraft and slavery. Hoping you can clear up a few points concerning these questions, I thank you in advance for your trouble."—RUSSELL COURTNEY, Lexington, Illinois.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—Whites on the coast of West Africa generally have charge of trading-stores, with colored assistants. Then there are small shipyards with foremen (whites) in charge of blacks, and whites who have learned the barter business. Large companies operate the field and send young men out on a three-year contract. They would not take any one under twenty-two or three.

Write your age, schooling and general experience and enclose medical certificate of health (the climate is very unhealthy to whites) to: Lever Brothers, Royal Lever Buildings, Liverpool, England.

The African Association, 43 Castle Street, Liverpool, England.

Alex. Miller and Brothers, 34 Beaufort Street, Liverpool, England.

African Traders Company, 42 Drury Buildings, Liverpool, England.

The pay is not very good, but the living is of the best. All the labor is done by the blacks. Whites do not colonize in West Africa, but go out for one to three years.

It is best to outfit after one gets there. Just take along any old clothes you have.

I could not in a letter give you the witchcraft practises of the natives as that would fill a book. Get from your nearest library:

Lower Nigeria and its Tribes, by Major A. G. Leonard.

White Man in Nigeria, by George D. Hazledine.

In the Shadow of the Bush, by P. A. Talbot.

In California's Lake District

CALIFORNIA—indeed every one of the Western and Southwestern States—offers enough opportunities to combine the business of making a living with the pleasure of just living:

Question:—"A friend and myself want to make a trip to the southwestern part of the States, preferably southern California.

"We are mechanics (electrician and machinist) but are not particular what kind of work we do. The idea is to get out-of-doors in a mild climate where we can make a living. We would like to be in the mountains where a little fishing and hunting could be had.

"Do you know of any government land that could be homesteaded where there is a good, healthy life and a living can be made? We have both had some experience in rough outdoor life. If you don't know of any place where we could locate permanently, could you recommend a quite out-of-the-way place where we could have hunting, fishing and water enough for swimming and a boat or canoe—where we could build a cabin so we could take a grub-stake and stay a couple of months each year? Not necessarily in southern California but any of the States you cover.

"This is a very mixed-up letter but I hope you

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can get the idea of what we want. We figure on going after the war as we are at present in the Navy."—J. R. STEWART, U. S. S. *Dixie*, care of Postmaster, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—There is a lot of land open for filing, but it is not very good for making a living on, as a rule. It is either poor land or else it is so far from markets and transportation lines that it is almost impossible to sell what you raise. That is the rule. Exceptions are rare and only to be found after an extended personal search.

Now when you put in the clause that you want land where you can have swimming and canoeing you have got me where the hair is short. To get the right combination of land to make a living on, with hunting, fishing, swimming and boating on the side, is a hard deal to ask for.

The Southwest has little water outside of mountain streams that stand on their heads, too small, too swift, and too rocky for a canoe. There are lakes formed by dams, but the land about them is either taken up by the inhabitants or else is forest reserve.

In Lake County, this State, there are lakes among the mountains, but the market is lacking. In Oregon there is Lake Chelan, 30 miles long, that is surely big enough. The climate is not a severe one and the country is settling up fast. There are a good many resorts starting around Chelan, where the tenderfoot and his wife go to sport with the wilderness.

There are lots of places where you can make a living in the West and Southwest, in all kinds of country, from flat desert to high mountains. But where nature or man has made a lake the shores are turned into the usual Summer resorts in a short time, unless it is where it is almost impossible to travel. You see, our streams are either flowing through farm lands where you stand no chance of enjoying camp life or else they are chasing down a mountain. No canoe can navigate one in the mountains, even where the water is deep enough; too swift a current. Most have too many rocks and too little water for a canoe, anyhow.

There are thousands of places where you can get the right to build a cabin, by paying a small annual rental to the Forest Service, and have all the solitude you want, as well as good hunting and trout fishing in the season. The Plumas National Forest is great for that. There is a lake in Plumas County, above Quincy, where many go for the Summer. Lassen County has three—Honey, Eagle and Horse Lakes.

You boys ought to get all the work you want in the shipbuilding line around San Francisco's inner bay and you could find plenty of wilderness by going north through Napa County.

My son is up there now, at work helping build destroyers in the Mare Island Navy Yard and living at Berkeley. Going east from there, once you are past Stockton you begin to get into true wilderness and run into a lot of historic places, such as Poker Flat, Angel's Camp, and all the rest that Bret Harte wrote about.

Go north to Lake County, about 80 miles from Frisco, and you hit Lake County's largest body of water, Clear Lake. The railroad has a station on its banks called Lakeport. It is a big lake and should furnish you plenty of fun, but I doubt there being as good fishing there as you find among the small streams in any of the eastern counties such as Alpine, Nevada, Sierra, Plumas, Placer or Eldorado. All the mountain country that lies around the western bend of Nevada State line is good for your need.

Help Him Out

WHO knows the answer to this? Send us the poem in question and we'll print it if we can—send it to the inquirer if we can't:

Question:—"I am anxious to get hold of the words, and if possible the music, of an old sea-ballad called 'The Flying Cloud,' which tells of the adventures and the final repentance of a pirate.

"Perhaps you can tell me of some books where I may find it; in case you can not tell me, is there any other source of information you would suggest?—M. D. HATHEWAY, New York.

Reply, by Captain Dingle:—While I know, or know in part, some fifty sea chanties and songs, the one you want is not among them. "The Flying Cloud" does not readily come to my memory; I'm afraid I must confess never to have heard this ballad.

The various collections of sea songs and near-sea songs—written by arrant landsmen mainly—can perhaps be seen by visiting the Central Library at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, New York. Or, such a firm as Brentano's, New York and Washington, could perhaps get copies for you. At least, in one of these places you could discover where to seek with the best likelihood of success.

Among the more important collections, in one of which the song of "The Flying Cloud" might be, are Masefield's "Salt-Water Ballads," Christopher Stone's collection, Bell & Daldy's "Book of Sea Songs," and a volume published by the Navy Records Society of Great Britain, the name of which I forget, but which matters little, since a letter to this society in London would receive attention and there is only the one book by them.

I am sorry to be of so little service to you. I hope you will have success in your search, and if any of the above hints prove useful I shall be gratified.

Keep Away from Aztec Land

REMEMBER *Mr. Punch's* celebrated "Advice to Those About to Get Married—Don't"? The same rides for those who want to go prospecting in the land of the Aztecs. Read:

Question:—"I would like some information about mining opportunities in border States of Mexico or interior. Could a man make a living by prospecting and hunting? Is there any game? If so in which State?

"I am a miner, electrician, trapper; soldier at present. Was in British Columbia and ice river country, hunting-trapping with good profit.

"I wish to go to some State in Mexico where there is an opportunity for a man like me. Have about $300 to start with. Used to hard living. Please advise me as to the chances."—MATHIAS KOVACK, Fort Stevens, Oregon, Ordnance Detachment.

Answer, by Mr. Robertson:—I am not in favor of Americans going into Mexico. Things are entirely

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too unsettled at the present time. That country is not in a safe condition for an American to go into the prospecting business on his own hook. Things may improve there so that by the time this war is over, a man can go there and try things on his own. At this time though, *it is not safe.*

I am sorry that I can not advise you to go into Mexico at this time. If when things are more settled you will write me, I will be more than glad to aid you with any information that I may have, or that I may be in a position to get for you.

How Things Are at Tahiti

THE Society Islands seem to be the Broadway and Forty-second Street of the South Seas—the White Light District of the antipodeal Pacific—to judge from this brace of letters:

Question:—"In 'Ask *Adventure*' no one seems to cover Tahiti, but as you handle Samoa am writing you.

"Am particularly interested in the Society Islands because I have always understood that the natives were friendly and kind, speaking English of a sort, and that one could live among them cheaply.

"Possibly some of the other South Sea Islands would be even better than Tahiti for my purpose. What I want is to get away from civilization as far as possible and photograph and write about the unusual.

Any information you can give me will be highly appreciated.

"Age, 50. Education, college—two years' medical study. Cheapest way to get there from Frisco. Have kept books—timekeeper—typist—done carpenter work—painting—run stationary engine—good photographer—owned and operated auto, motor-boat, sailing yacht—worked as newspaper reporter.

"Have about $500 cash and wish to spend a few years among the natives—study their language, habits and customs—write some good stuff based upon actual experience and observation. Would like to engage in some trade or occupation that will pay my expenses while there.

"No desire to make money—simply to live and shall expect to adapt myself to native way of living and put up with inconveniences.

"Have knocked about all over the U. S., Canada and Mexico. Can play violin and banjo and make myself liked among almost any people that I have ever met."—H. D. LEDBETTER, Oakdale, Allegheny Co., Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—The Society Islands are a bit out of my beat, but what little I can tell you about them is at your disposal. The Society group includes Tahiti, with Papeete as its capital. These islands are French; therefore you will need more than a smattering of that language to get along.

The group is "hot stuff" in more senses than one, and there are many other islands in the South Seas I would rather recommend to my friends than thereabouts. The natives are friendly, all right—more sophisticated than otherwise. But that, I find, has its attractions with some wanderers, who have preferred the Society to any of the other groups. Mind you, I'm only telling you. Perhaps you know as much about that as I have heard.

The natives, like many of those of the South Seas, have a smattering of English, because of the work of the missionaries. Living is not dear if you are a moderate liver.

For your purpose, I should say avoid Tahiti. Get into any of the other groups. Your general experience would help you along in the islands, where a man can not know too wide a range of things—and certainly a little knowledge about a lot of things is of more use there than a whole lot of knowledge about, say, astronomy. If you could get along there right now, I should say your savings would be well spent and you would have a happy if not a prosperous time.

Wishing you the best of good luck.

The Cariboo Country

BRITISH COLUMBIA certainly does offer tempting rewards to husky he men who are ready to hustle while they wait:

Question:—"My friend and I intend to go prospecting for minerals in British Columbia, 'gold preferred.' I have one place in view at present which is the Cariboo country. Is that the most progressive part for mineral resources in British Columbia? After reaching there could a person find employment with some of the mine owners, and what would our chances be there?

"Please state the living conditions and how should a man be financially fixed before venturing into those parts?"—EDWIN E. SCHAEFER, Collins, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—I am of the opinion that the Cariboo district would be as good a place as any for you and your friend to start in as you would gain in experience if nothing else. Employment is readily obtained, or rather was recently and the conditions are probably very little if any changed. I do not know what you mean by asking if it is the most progressive part for mineral resources but it is easy of access and a good place to start.

A man who intends to begin prospecting at once should have at least three hundred dollars when he arrives. This would be more than would be required by an experienced man but you must take into consideration that you are going to have a few mistakes to pay for.

The living conditions are the same there as anywhere else. Of course when out in the wilderness you must be prepared to camp out as there will be no hotels or even houses within reach. When working at a mine there will be a permanent camp where you will be well fed and have a place to sleep, you of course to furnish your own blankets.

There is also placer in the Ominica and Upper Fraser countries but you would probably be better in the Cariboo or Cassiar countries rather than to get so far afield that you might experience difficulty in getting back again.

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HOW TO HELP WIN THE WAR

A Department Telling What *You* Can Do And How to Find Out About It

To make such a department comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date entails much work and considerable machinery. Since this machinery has already been created and put into operation, *Adventure* can render service most efficiently by giving its readers the use of this practical agency for connecting individual willingness with national needs.

Adventure's big brother, *Everybody's Magazine*, now conducts a "War Service Guide."

There are thousands of good Americans who, with all their hearts, want to help in the big job at hand, but do not know what to do or how to find it and it is these patriots which *Everybody's* "Guide" wants to help enlist where they can be of real service. If you are one of them, write to Mr. Hoyt, care of *Everybody's* "Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Tell him your circumstances and your qualifications—whether you are looking for volunteer or paid work, whether you can give all or part time, in your home only, or anyhere the job may call you. Give him all the data he may need to judge what work you might do. There are "bits" to be done in farm and industrial work, in various relief organizations and in the Government offices as well as in the Army or Navy.

Everybody's "Guide" will also be glad to tackle any question of allowance or allotment, Government insurance or legal status growing out of the new and closer relationship which many are forming with Uncle Sam. Let *Everybody's* "Guide" try to help you.

Do YOUR Part

Find out what to do and how to do it by writing to—MR. HOYT,
Everybody's "War Service Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

STINSON, WILLIAM J. Husband of Mary E. Stinson. Until about six years ago, resided at Houson and Stewart Street, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, and about that time removed to Welland, Ontario.—Address WALTER A. OLSEN, 2131 Humboldt Boulevard, Chicago, Ill.

JOHNSON, HARRY C. Age 20 years. Last heard of at Sacramento, California, in 1916.—Address JESSE C. JOHNSON, 3rd Co. C.A.D., Ft. Mills, Manila Bay, P. I.

FILLINGHAM, FRED L. Left his home in Rochester, N. Y., December 16, 1915. Carpenter by trade. If any one will send any information concerning him or if he will write to his wife he will learn something to his advantage concerning some property left to him.—Address MARY S. FILLINGHAM, 1014 12th St., N.W., Washington, D. C.

GILDAY, JOHN E., who was with me through Utah, Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska on the U.P.R.R. last Fall and Winter. Age 21, weight about 145 and height about 5 ft. 7 in. Reward for his address.—Address EDWARD R. HANOVER, 341 West St., New York, U. S. A.

WARD, W. N. Gunner's mate. U.S.S. *Delaware.* Please write your old friend. We met last in Vera Cruz, April, 1914.—Address WM. BROCKWAY, Oriental Park, Marianoo, Cuba.

LAGOTA, NELLIE, ANNIE AND MINNIE; the latter now married to Frank Jablorispis. Last heard of in Cleveland, in 1905, the first two were last heard of in London, England, about 1906. The son of Sallie Lagota would like to communicate with you.—Address ANTHONY PAVELKIS, Box 78, Summit, Ill.

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BREWER, BUCHNER, "LIZZIE" PROUTY, "POP" CASPERS, CLARKE and numerous others of the old "Quarantine" squad. I'd like to know where they are.—Address P. S. BERRY, Government Wireless Station, Belize, British Honduras.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

WINSTON, ERNST. Please communicate with your old pal "Nibs."—Address FRANK E. WOODS, care of *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WHITE, JOHN S. Son. Disappeared from home five years ago. He is 45 years old, about 5 feet 6 inches tall, light complexion, gray eyes. Mother would be grateful for any information concerning him.—Address MRS. S. J. WHITE, 198 Gibson Ave., Detroit, Mich.

HECK, "HELL-ROARING." Last heard of in Plainfield, N. J. Write to your old friend and partner, "SPANISH JACK," at the same old address.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

LASKI. Information desired of CHARLES or ALEXANDER. Last heard from in New York in 1891. It is to the advantage of either or both of them that they communicate with me. Any news of them gratefully received.—Address D. W. HULBURD, Attorney, Witherspoon Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa.

SHAFFER, E. T. Telegraph operator. Last heard of working for the N. & W. in Virginia, in 1906, but understand he went back West. A. write] to me. Have been trying to locate you ever since "Mama's little Willie boys went around the world."—Address C. M., Portage, Ohio.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First-November or Mid-November issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ANDERSON, John Emil (brother); Chafin, W. R. and Roderic Morrough; Chipman ——; Fred (brother); Dunkerley, Fred; Gowen, Floyd E.; Guttroff, Herman Martin (uncle); Hart, Frank J.; Heck "Hell-Roaring"; Hughill, Ashton C. and Hugh Van Alstyn; Jackson, Charles; Laski, Charles or Alexander; Love, Robt.; Manley, Clifford E.; Marrone, Vito; Price, George E.; Rapideau, John; Redding, Robert C.; Shaffer, E. T.; Stillings, George E.; Sullivan, John; Van Sickle, W. D.; Waidner, George; Walker, William; Washbroad, Tommy or Jo; White, P. L.; White, James Frederick; White, John S.; Zabransky, William (cousin).

MISCELLANEOUS—Dodson, Claude E. Miller, Bird, Boyd, or any of the other boys I chummed with in Santa Fé. Boys of the 213th O.S. C.E.F. American Legion.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; Wm. Tien Tang.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. Cox, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-DECEMBER ADVENTURE

These ten snapping red-blooded stories, besides the two mentioned in the ad on page 2, will come to you in the Mid-December issue, in your hand on November 18th;

SEA BLOOD — *By Kingsbury Scott*

A tale of life on the turbulent Great Lakes—of the people who go to the ships for a living—and one who hates the deep waters.

THE THOUSAND TO ONE CHANCE — *By Willett Stockard*

A story of the West—and a card-player who depends upon his invariable luck to pull him through no matter how deep the game

NOT YET — *By George L. Catton and Harry M. Moore*

In the Alaskan wilderness you meet this fellow—starving and miles from nowhere, death staring him in the face.

THE COLOR OF HER SOUL — *By S. B. H. Hurst*

Floating on the beach of one of the South Sea Islands you find this wreck of a raft with its more than a wreck of a passenger.

LITTLE PAL — *By Hapsburg Liebe*

A story of the Southland, the lumber camps—of little *Red*, the New Orleans waif, and his big pal.

THE AWFUL LIAR — *By V. V. Farms*

He's a queer personality, is *Babe Cadwallander*—and his tales are queerer still. Perhaps you'll agree with the Canadian mining-camp's judgment of him.

THE PASSING OF GORILLA GEORGE — *By R. N. Wall*

Reformation is a hard road. Just as *Dan Farmer* thinks he is firmly upon it, along comes *Gorilla George*.

RED'S EXAMPLE — *By Clyde B. Hough*

A great hulk of a man, all bulging muscle and unshapely limbs, with the strength of six men—that is *Red* when he comes to the California quarry.

GABOREAU THE TERRIBLE. Part IV — *By Gordon Young*

In the fourth part of this thrilling story Gaboreau's house becomes an impromptu moving-picture studio—for a picture with too many directors.

THAT KIND OF A COUNTRY — *By Wilbur Hall*

Down on to the Mexican border this story takes you, into a stormy cattle corral, half on each side of the line.

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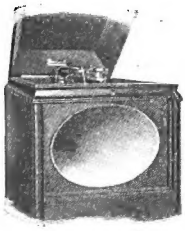
"Why I Chose a Brunswick"

By BURTON WYNNE

Adventures in Seeking the Super-Phonograph

FOR years my family has wanted a phonograph. Yet we hesitated. We were on the verge of buying often, but delayed.

We love music. And we value the phonograph for the wealth of world-wide talent it brings to the home.



But frankly, we waited during the last few years, hearing the different phonographs and weighing their different advantages — never quite satisfied.

We felt that sooner or later a better phonograph would come, overcoming all the current handicaps and setting new standards.

We never liked the idea of a phonograph which would play only its own make of records. No one catalog contained all our favorites. Each line of records offered its attractions.

Another thing we quarrelled with was tone. We were repelled at the strident tones of some. And others seemed to be nearly perfect, but not quite.

I realize that all this sounds like we were too critical and that we set ourselves above the thousands who were content with the phonographs we hesitated to buy.

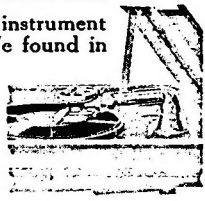
But we wanted to be sure before we bought, so as to avoid regrets.

In our determination to find the super-phonograph, we came upon the new Brunswick. It was announced as something different, something advanced.

We read and heard of the Brunswick Method of Reproduction, which included the Ultona and an improved amplifier.

And so we investigated. We were somewhat skeptical — but we came away as proud owners.

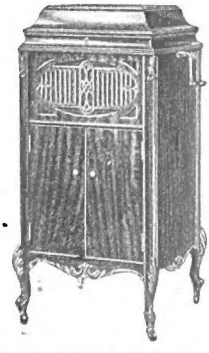
For here, at last, was our ideal instrument—one which played all records at their best, one with incomparable tone.



This remarkable instrument ended our search. We found in the Brunswick Method of Reproduction all we had looked for and more.

The Ultona is a simple, convenient, all-record player, adjustable to any type of record at a turn of the hand. And now we buy our records according to artists rather than make. Thus we overcome the old-time limitations.

I am convinced that the tone of The Brunswick is far superior, and due chiefly to the strict observance of acoustic laws.



The tone amplifier is built entirely of wood, molded so as to give the sound waves full opportunity to develop. No metal is used in this amplifier, so there are no stunted, metallic sounds.

My advice to every music lover is to hear The Brunswick before deciding. One's ear immediately appreciates the difference. And old conceptions of the phonograph are changed.

Brunswick dealers everywhere are delighted to play the new Brunswick for you and to explain its betterments.

THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER CO.

General Offices: CHICAGO and NEW YORK

Branch Houses in Principal Cities of United States, Mexico and Canada

Canadian Distributors, Musical Merchandise Sales Co. Excelsior Life Building, Toronto

The Brunswick

ALL PHONOGRAPHS IN ONE

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. . . and at big hotels and clubs, East and West

A fact:

Sales reports from 8 leading cities—just as received at our main office during the last week in August:

ARMY and NAVY CLUB, Washington, D. C.:
"Fatima sells biggest—irrespective of price"

BELLEVUE-STRATFORD, Philadelphia:
"Fatima outsells all other cigarettes, except two 25-cent brands"

CONGRESS HOTEL, Chicago:
"Fatima is one of the leading sellers among the better brands"

HOTEL ASTOR, N. Y. City:
"We sell more Fatimas than any other cigarette"

HOTEL GIBSON, Cincinnati:
"Fatima leads all other brands in sales"

HOTEL SINTON, Cincinnati:
"More Fatimas are sold than any other cigarette"

HOTEL WILLARD, Washington, D. C.:
"Fatima is biggest-selling cigarette"

MARSHALL FIELD'S GENTLEMEN'S GRILL, Chicago:
"Fatima is as big if not a bigger seller than any of the other high-class brands"

MISSOURI ATHLETIC CLUB, St. Louis:
"Fatima still holds first place in sales"

OFFICERS' CLUB, West Point:
"More Fatimas smoked than any other cigarette"

RACQUET CLUB, St. Louis:
"Fatima is larg-st seller"

THE PONCHARTRAIN, Detroit:
"Fatima is the second best-selling brand"

THE SHOREHAM, Washington, D. C.:
"With one exception, Fatima is best seller"

UNION CLUB, Cleveland:
"Fatima is one of the largest sellers"

FATIMA

A Sensible Cigarette

And Fatima gives full, honest value—instead of "showy" looks. It is for every smoker who wants a cigarette that never "talks back," even if a man should smoke more often than usual.

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.

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